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Georgia...England's James Trafford celebrates after winning the European Under-21 Championship (more on pages 23 & 124)

Spain...restoration work begins on Barcelona's Camp Nou stadium

Scotland...Georgia's Lasha Dvali slides in on John McGinn on a rain-soaked Hampden Park pitch during their Euro 2024 qualifying clash

Portugal...Argentina winger Angel Di Maria is greeted by Benfica supporters after returning to his old club

India...Sunil Chhetri celebrates at the 2023 SAFF Championship. India's captain was the tournament's top scorer as they lifted the trophy for the ninth time

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Australia...Melbourne Victory Afghan Women celebrate a goal in the Hope Cup. Many of the players have settled in Melbourne after fleeing Taliban rule in their home country

Brazil...Chile defender Catalina Figueroa takes a ball to the face during her team's international friendly against Brazil

Ecuador...Independiente del Valle's Alexis Villa fails to keep the ball out during his side's Copa Libertadores clash v Argentinos Juniors (more on page 114)

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FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

Usually, the start of a new season is cause for optimism and enthusiasm. This one is the same, of course, but there is also a sense of trepidation at the growing power in the Middle East, and a question: is football on the verge of another seismic change?

The Saudi Arabian league's ambitious expansion has dominated the summer, affecting almost every major club in Europe, whether directly or indirectly. In the space of a few short months, it has gone from being dismissed as a "retirement league" to one that is able to attract players in their 20s with plenty left in the tank to offer at the highest level.

It has certainly shaken the confidence of those who considered Europe's position at the top of football to be invulnerable. The Champions League and "Big Five" of course remain the elite level of the game for now, but there is a tipping point at which there are so many great players in one place that it simply has to be treated as one of the world's premier competitions. Other leagues have tried and failed to reach that point – the Chinese Super League never got close, while MLS remains a work in progress – and the Saudi Pro League still has a long way to go. Yet, with Premier League stars Riyad Mahrez, Jordan Henderson, Allan Saint-Maximin and Fabinho all reportedly on the verge of moves to the league as this issue went to print, it shows no sign of slowing down.

There is a sense of trepidation at the growing power in the Middle East, and a question: is football on the verge of another seismic change?

Keir Radnedge and John Duerden have both taken a closer look at the league and its potential, and what this summer means for the rest of the world.

For now, though, Europe remains home to the best and most competitive leagues on the planet, and we have expert analysis of all the major ones in this souvenir season preview edition.

There's plenty more crammed into this bumper issue, with a full review of the CONCACAF Gold Cup, a look at plenty of summer transfers including the latest *Galactico*, Jude Bellingham, plus loads more.

Jamie Evans, Assistant Editor

Statement signing ...Rice

ENGLAND

Arsenal break transfer records

Arsenal signalled their intentions of competing again for the Premier League title by completing a record £105 million move for England star Declan Rice from West Ham United.

The up-front fee of £100m matches that paid by Manchester City for Jack Grealish in 2021, with the extra £5m in add-ons making the midfielder the most expensive English footballer of all time, just falling short of the British record transfer fee of £106.8m that Chelsea paid for Enzo Fernandez in January.

With deals also completed for Kai Havertz (Chelsea, £65m) and Jurrien Timber (Ajax, £38.5m), the Gunners have already passed the £200m mark this summer, making it their biggest transfer window of all time, demonstrating the financial benefits of returning to the Champions League.

Likewise, Manchester United completed the £47.2m signing of goalkeeper Andre Onana

Gunners new boy...Timber made the switch from Ajax

"Given the existing discrepancies on the interpretation of the relevant contractual terms applicable to the Super League Project, Juventus confirms that it has initiated the procedure to exit"

Juventus confirm, following discussions, its withdrawal from plans for the European Super League

from Internazionale following the departure of David De Gea, and captured England midfielder Mason Mount from Chelsea for £55m, as the Premier League continued to vastly outspend the rest of Europe's top leagues.

More transfers on page 18 and in the season preview section from page 55

United signing... Mount in action in pre-season

SPAIN

Sevilla win inaugural UEFA-CONMEBOL Club Challenge

La Liga outfit Sevilla overcame Ecuadorian side Independiente del Valle in the first of a potentially regular fixture organised by UEFA and CONMEBOL.

In an expansion of the partnership between the two confederations, the UEFA-CONMEBOL Club Challenge pits the winners of the two continents' secondary club competitions – the Europa League and Copa Sudamericana – against each other.

This year's match, which Sevilla won on penalties after a 1-1 draw in normal time, was a pilot, with a renewal for next season yet to be confirmed. The Spaniards hosted and treated the game as a friendly; a small crowd was in attendance, both teams were allowed unlimited substitutions, and it proceeded straight to a shootout at the end of 90 minutes, which Sevilla went on to win 4-1.

Inaugural UEFA-CONMEBOL Club Challenge winners...Sevilla

The month in numbers

Eye-catching facts and stats from the world of football...

2
Number of times Italy have now won the U19 European Championship after beating Portugal in the 2023 edition's final in Malta.

Under-19 European champions...Italy

10
Days that Jose Mourinho will be suspended for at the start of the new Serie A season due to comments he made about a referee in May.

88
The squad number that has been banned from use by the Italian Football Federation (FIGC), due to its connotations with anti-Semitism and Nazism.

2
Clubs now owned by Todd Boehly's BlueCo consortium after the Chelsea owner bought a majority stake in Ligue 1 club Strasbourg.

17
Months that Zimbabwe's Football Association was banned by FIFA for third-party interference until the suspension was lifted in July, meaning the country was included in the draw for the 2026 World Cup qualifiers.

56
Age of Kazuyoshi Miura, the world's oldest footballer, who will continue to play in the new season on loan at Portuguese side Oliveirense.

39
Years since England's last victory in the U21 European Championship before winning this year's trophy in Georgia and Romania.

1
Hannah Dingley was the first female manager of a professional men's team in England after taking charge of League Two Forest Green Rovers on an interim basis.

3
Tier of Belgian football that Royal Excelsior Virton will play at, the club that has been recently purchased by Al Ittihad and France midfielder N'Golo Kante.

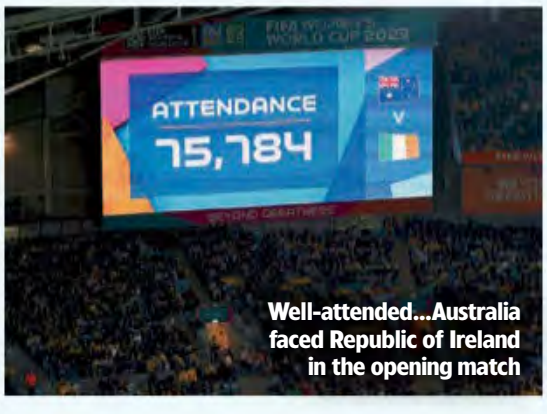
€300k
Fine handed out to Manchester United by UEFA for a "minor" Financial Fair Play (FFP) breach over a four-year period between 2019 and 2022.

20
Minutes that Republic of Ireland's Women's World Cup warm-up match with Colombia lasted before being abandoned for being "overly physical".

5
Number of goals netted by top scorer and tournament MVP Gaku Nawata, after Japan won the 2023 U17 Asian Cup in Thailand.

8
Number of club teams that will take part in the inaugural African Football League when it launches in October.

1.4m
Ticket sales at this year's Women's World Cup, already beating the previous record of 1.35 million, set in Canada 2015.



Well-attended...Australia faced Republic of Ireland in the opening match

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

The long road

Saudi Arabia's march towards world domination has been a long time in the making

Saudi Arabia should be odds-on favourites to stage the World Cup finals in 2034 with many of the mysteriously-financed offshore betting outfits whose weird labels litter Premier League stadia.

But those who think that the Saudi assault on football's establishment – never mind golf and boxing – has only just exploded out of the desert sun have not been paying attention.

No use panicking now at the prospect of Saudi petro-dollars buying European clubs or of FAs funding themselves in hock to its state sponsors. No use bleating at the advance of sportswashing on a grand scale; Saudi Arabia has been hammered over human rights abuses and mass executions for so long it has become part of the wallpaper.

All too late. Nor will the Saudis crash and burn like the short-lived Chinese Super League. Football was a significant feature of Saudi sporting culture even before the national team's World Cup debut in 1994 was announced by Saeed Al Owairan's remarkable solo goal against Belgium.

All 22 members of the Saudi squad in 1994 were drawn from local clubs, as were all 26 players at the World Cup in Qatar last year. No reason for any to move abroad given the financial, competitive and cultural strength of the domestic league. This provided one frustration for imported Brazilian and British coaches: discipline was impossible to enforce in a context so lucrative that fines were inconsequential.

The long road... Saudi Arabia's football journey began before USA '94

The three-decade Saudi advance – and every country has the right to develop, promote and project itself on the international stage – has followed four classic steps: international results, event staging, top-table influence and foreign investment outreach. All of this has been undertaken with state support, though not everything has gone to plan.

> Those who think that the Saudi assault on football's establishment – never mind golf and boxing – has only just exploded out of the desert sun have not been paying attention

A nation's international status is headlined by its match results, all the more important since a refined FIFA World Ranking was afforded a central role in tournament seedings.

Saudi Arabia have a positive tale to tell on that front. They have won the Asian Cup three times and appeared at the World Cup finals on six occasions since their debut in 1994. Their 2022 campaign was the most memorable yet, with that dramatic opening defeat of eventual champions Argentina. Saudi Arabia escaped to victory despite conceding an early penalty scored by their own most high-profile tourism ambassador, Leo Messi.

At club level Al Hilal have won the Asian Champions League a record four times and reached a further five finals, then further underscored Saudi power as the first Asian team to reach the final of the Club World Cup, losing the 2022 event 5-3 to Real Madrid back in February.

Tournament staging, demanding state involvement, further ramps up international profile. The Saudis will

host the next Club World Cup in December, followed by the Asian Cup finals in 2027, the Asian Winter Games in 2029 and the Asian Games in 2034. It is also bidding for the 2026 Women's Asian Cup and wants the Men's FIFA World Cup itself.

A triple confederation mishmash with Greece and Egypt for 2030 was always speculative. Now Saudi sits alone in pole position for 2034. Rotation is not an issue: two other tournaments will have been staged since Asia's Qatar hosting in 2022. Qatar has also set the precedent for another winter World Cup and the geography "works" for European television. Plus, unlike Qatar, the Saudi national team can point to a World Cup track record.

The wheeling and dealing is conducted out of sight in the committee rooms, corridors and murky corners of world football. Hence the importance of seats at the table. The Saudis have been leveraging their influence with ever-increasing success over the last decade.

There have been two bids (both unsuccessful) for the AFC presidency by Saudi candidates, both supported by the government. There had been the creation – along with the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Bahrain – of the disruptive political and economic anti-Qatar coalition, whose alleged tactics included the hosting of a satellite pirate operation to undermine the international TV rights deals of Qatar's *beIN* in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Saudi Arabia's international profile has been revolutionised by the rise to power of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), Gianni Infantino's guest of honour at the opening match of the 2018 World Cup in Moscow. FIFA's insistence that football and politics do not mix means there was no embarrassment for its president to be seated next to MBS, even while the Saudis came under scrutiny for all the wrong reasons after the murder of *The Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul in 2018 and the escalating bombing of Yemen.

Simultaneously, Infantino suddenly sought to bulldoze through FIFA Council a secretive scheme to raise $25 billion by selling a chunk of media rights to finance a half-baked plan for a global nations league and putative expanded Club World Cup. The connection? Much of the money would come from the global tech investor SoftBank whose major investors include – surprise, surprise – Saudi Arabia.

In the event, of course, UEFA outrage and then the COVID-19 pandemic put everything on hold before the next Saudi initiative came along in 2021. This time Infantino joyously embraced a Saudi proposal to stage the World Cup every two years. The idea ultimately died a well-deserved death but not before having provided an unnecessary distraction for a game struggling to regroup after the pandemic.

The vapid nonsense did the reputations of both Infantino and the Saudis no favours. Hence the expanded Club World Cup will launch in 2025 after all but will not be hosted by the Saudis, as originally envisaged, but in the United States.

So to the final plank in Saudi soccer expansion: overseas investment. Approval had been granted all the way back in 2016 for the privatisation of state-owned sports clubs in what Middle East analyst James M. Dorsey described as part of MBS's "drive to streamline bureaucracy, curb public spending, diversify the kingdom's oil-dependent economy, and upgrade its autocracy."

This "Vision 2030" opened the door to hosting the Italian and Spanish Super Cups, a toe-in-the-water purchase of European clubs (Newcastle United), and the multi-million lure of ageing stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and the rest. Money no object; the PIF sovereign wealth fund holds assets valued at over $700bn.

This brings the international power balance to where it sits today.

Infantino has been roundly criticised for cosying up to the Saudis and their money but he recognised a direction of travel to which most observers were oblivious: Saudi Arabia has been on the move for many years. Hence, despite all its clumsy blunders (including a tone-deaf bid to sponsor the Women's World Cup), the ultimate status symbol of World Cup hosting is in sight.

Allies...Mohammed bin Salman and Gianni Infantino watch Russia v Saudi Arabia at the 2018 World Cup

BOOKS THIS MONTH

LIONESSES
By Abdullah Abdullah (Pitch Publishing, £12.99)

England's emphatic victory at the 2022 Women's Euros has been called a watershed moment both for the team and for women's football. But can this talented side prove their mettle on the biggest stage of all and win the 2023 World Cup? *Lionesses* tackles this burning question by examining the key tactical concepts and analysing the core identity instilled in the side by manager Sarina Wiegman. The book looks at their displays at the 2022 Euros and assesses their chances at the 2023 World Cup and beyond.

CROSSING THE PARK
By Peter Kenny Jones (Pitch Publishing, £18.99)

Crossing the Park: The Men Who Dared to Play for Both Liverpool and Everton casts a spotlight on the players who have turned out for both Merseyside clubs. Why have so few players crossed the park? What is the legacy of those who did? The story of this unique rivalry is told through exclusive interviews with the men who dared to cross the divide.

Jonathan WILSON
TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Operation rebuild: can Klopp revive Liverpool?

Perhaps the hardest aspect of management is to take apart a team that has been successful and build a new one. These days, when the managerial life span is scarcely longer than that of the mayfly, it is rarely even considered but, after a fifth-place finish last season, Jurgen Klopp, who has always felt a throwback to the old dynastic managers, is faced with overseeing major transition. Ahead of his eighth full season as Liverpool manager, the German faces the awful task of looking at faithful retainers and telling them their time is up, while tweaking the principles that have made the Reds so successful under him.

Many of the great managers have struggled to create a second great side. Bill Shankly managed it belatedly, but only after a defeat to Second Division Watford in the FA Cup in 1970 had made clear the cost of loyalty to his ageing Liverpool players. Don Revie left Leeds rather than have to go through the process. Arsene Wenger managed it once but couldn't pull off the same trick a second time. Sir Alex Ferguson was a master of it, most notably in 1995 when Mark Hughes, Paul Ince and Andrei Kanchelskis were all sold after Manchester United had finished runners-up in both the league and the FA Cup.

Klopp, whose stints at Mainz and Dortmund both lasted seven seasons, has never done it before – and on both occasions, the seventh season demonstrated a marked downturn. His seventh anniversary at Liverpool came up last October. It's over-simplistic to speak of his methods having a seven-year span, as though the clock suddenly strikes midnight and his side is transformed into a pumpkin pulled my mice, but equally there does inevitably come a point at which transition is necessary.

Operation rebuild... Jurgen Klopp faces his biggest challenge yet at Liverpool

Context, always, is vital. The previous season Liverpool had come within two games of clinching the quadruple. No side had ever got so close before. Regardless of other factors, a level of fatigue – physical and emotional – is only natural. To lose in the Champions League final and for around an hour on the final day of the season to be one goal from going top of the table must inevitably dull the edge. It was apparent from Liverpool's opening game of last season, away at Fulham, that something wasn't quite right, that there wasn't the same snap and sharpness about the press, that Liverpool weren't physically overwhelming sides in the way they used to.

> Many of the great managers have struggled to create a second great side

We've seen this before from this Liverpool. In the COVID season of 2020-21, they were often off the pace, lost 7-2 at Aston Villa and suffered six consecutive defeats at home – in part, presumably, because of the absence of the Anfield crowd. Liverpool's pressing is what made them Premier League and European champions despite their (relatively) limited budget, but it also makes them vulnerable. It only has to go slightly awry for other issues to be exposed. Trent Alexander-Arnold,

Reinforcement ...Dominik Szoboszlai has arrived from RB Leipzig

for instance, is arguably the best attacking right-back in the world, but is not so comfortable defensively. Without the intense press to prevent opponents targeting him with balls in behind, without Liverpool's domination of games, his defensive shortcomings are exposed. Even Virgil van Dijk looked less commanding last season.

Which raises a number of questions. Could it be that other Premier League teams can now match Liverpool physically? If that is the case, then Klopp needs a major rethink. Injuries were a major issue last year – is that coincidence or is that the result of strain imposed by Liverpool's style?

And what about the midfield? James Milner and Naby Keita have been moved on, while Thiago at 32 is beyond his peak. The futures of Jordan Henderson and Fabinho were unresolved at the time of writing, but both have shown signs of wear and tear. At 29, the Brazilian should still be in top condition, but slumped alarmingly last season; was that a blip, or a permanent downturn borne out of Klopp's relentless demands?

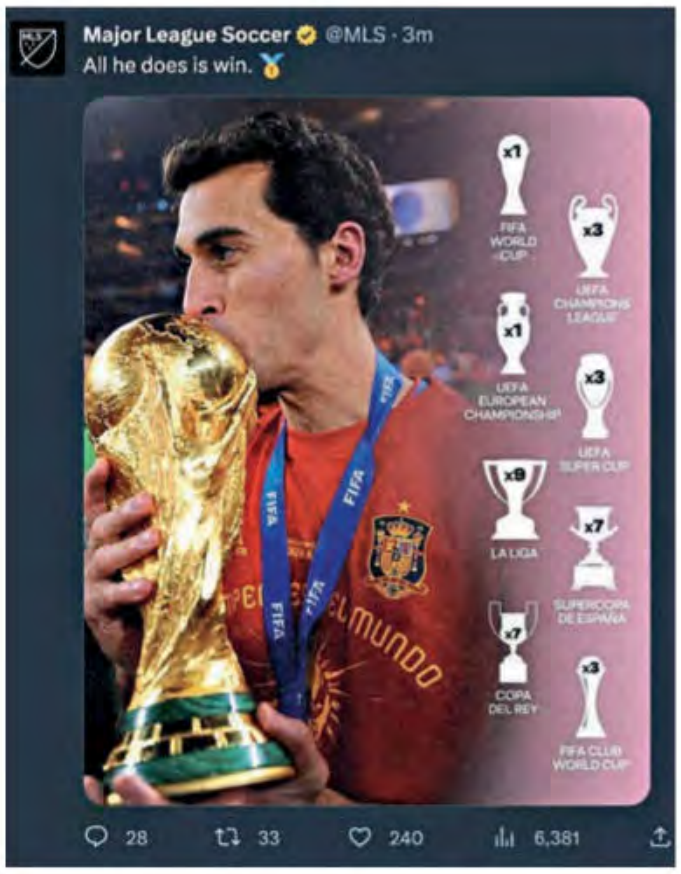
Similarly, is Van Dijk, now 32, still capable of being the indomitable player he was in the past? Were his struggles a result of the breakdown of the press or of age beginning to erode his immense talents?

But equally there have been questions about Klopp, and the reasons behind the departures of so many figures behind the scenes. The intensity that drives a winner can easily curdle in defeat.

After rejuvenating the forward line last season, the focus this summer has been on rejigging the midfield. Alexis Mac Allister at 24 and Dominik Szoboszlai, 22, are young, dynamic players, precisely what is needed to restore energy to Liverpool. Both also have the technical ability to allow Liverpool to play a more possession-based game if required.

It may be that that, plus a mental reset, is enough. The fear for Klopp, though, must be that the issues are more fundamental, that football has caught up with Liverpool.

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP



Wrong player... the tweet by MLS

1 MIAMI MIX-UP

"All he does is win" tweeted Major League Soccer's official account in announcing the transfer of Sergio Busquets to Inter Miami, with a graphic detailing the Barcelona legend's career honours. The problem? Instead of adding a picture of Busquets to the tweet, it was an image of his former Spain team-mate Alvaro Arbeloa. "Admin needs new glasses," read a follow-up tweet, owning up to the error.

2 OWN IT

AFC Croydon received a boost after being taken over by a consortium headed up by Ivory Coast forward Wilfried Zaha and rapper Stormzy. The non-league outfit play in the ninth tier, and were founded in 2012 after Croydon Athletic folded. "The consortium will own, operate and develop their childhood hometown football club," said a statement announcing the takeover. "They hope to take the entire community on this exciting journey with them." The duo will be joined by Danny Young, the former head of player care at Crystal Palace.

3 PROLIFIC PRE-SEASON

Bayern Munich certainly mean business ahead of the new season after thumping non-league side Rottach-Egern 27-0 in a pre-season friendly. The German giants were 5-0 up inside 13 minutes and led 18-0 at half-time, and refused to slow down in the second half with Mathys Tel, Jamal Musiala and Marcel Sabitzer scoring five goals each. The result means that the Bavarians have an aggregate score of 70-2 in their three meetings with Rottach-Egern, having beaten them 20-2 in 2018 and 23-0 in 2019.

4 HONOUR AMONGST THIEVES

Napoli's *Scudetto*-winning manager Luciano Spalletti stepped down from his role at the club last season, but not without a parting gift from the club's ultras. After ending the team's long wait for a league title, fans delivered a large, extravagantly wrapped box to their boss. The contents? The steering wheel and CDs that had been stolen from his car during protests against his tenure two years earlier.

5 GALLARDO'S *HUEVOS*

A statue celebrating Marcelo Gallardo's triumphant era as coach of River Plate raised eyebrows by accentuating a particular body part of the Argentine club's ex-boss. "I exaggerated that part," admitted the sculptor, Mercedes Savall, adding: "This is football, fans always ask the players and the manager to 'put a lot of *huevos* [eggs] into it'." *Huevos*, needless to say, is Argentine slang for testicles, and River certainly showed plenty of *cajones* while Gallardo was in charge after winning two Copas Libertadores, including in 2018 when they beat arch-rivals Boca Juniors in an infamously bad-tempered final. He departed the club in 2022 after eight successful years in charge.

Huevos...Marcelo Gallardo's statue

"After discussions with the manager today he has informed me he is changing captain. He outlined his reasons to me and whilst I'm personally extremely disappointed, I will continue to give my all"

England defender Harry Maguire on losing the Manchester United captaincy

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

EUROPE

Following their relegation to Serie B, Sampdoria appointed **ANDREA PIRLO** as their new head coach. In the top flight, **MARCO BARONI** left Lecce to take chare of Verona, and newly-promoted Frosinone hired **EUSEBIO DI FRANCESCO** to replace Fabio Grosso. Former Italy and Liverpool midfielder **ALBERTO AQUILANI** took his first senior managerial role at second-tier side Pisa.

Homecoming...Ramsey back at Cardiff City

Wales legend **AARON RAMSEY** completed a return to boyhood club Cardiff City after leaving French outfit Nice by mutual consent. The midfielder came through the Bluebirds' youth academy and returned for a spell on loan there from Arsenal in 2011.

Leeds United hired former Norwich City boss **DANIEL FARKE** on their return to the Championship, while Swansea City poached **MICHAEL DUFF** from Barnsley to replace **RUSSELL MARTIN**, who took charge of Southampton.

New challenge ...Robbie Keane

In France, Paris Saint-Germain hired **LUIS ENRIQUE**, **PATRICK VIEIRA** joined Strasbourg, Nice appointed **FRANCESCO FARIOLI** after the caretaker tenure of Didier Digard, and **ADI HUTTER** took charge of Monaco.

Israeli giants Maccabi Tel Aviv named Republic of Ireland's record goalscorer **ROBBIE KEANE** as their new coach.

After Andoni Iraola joined the Premier League to take charge of Bournemouth, Rayo Vallecano replaced their coach with former Elche boss **FRANCISCO**.

ASIA

Qatari side Al Duhail signed Italian midfielder **IBRAHIMA BAMBA** – who trained with the *Azzurri's* senior squad this summer – from Vitoria Guimaraes in Portugal, while Al Rayyan activated a relegation clause in Spain forward

SUMMER 2023 BIGGEST MOVES SO FAR

Record signing ...Declan Rice

New Magpies star ...Sandro Tonali

United new boy ...Mason Mount

£105m	**Declan Rice**	*West Ham United to Arsenal*
£88.5m	**Jude Bellingham**	*B. Dortmund to Real Madrid*
£65m	**Kai Havertz**	*Chelsea to Arsenal*
£60m	**Dominik Szoboszlai**	*RB Leipzig to Liverpool*
£55m	**Mason Mount**	*Chelsea to Manchester United*
£55m	**Sandro Tonali**	*Milan to Newcastle United*
£52m	**Christopher Nkunku**	*RB Leipzig to Chelsea*
£51m	**Manuel Ugarte**	*Sporting to PSG*
£47.2m	**Andre Onana**	*Inter to Manchester United*
£47m	**Ruben Neves**	*Wolves to Al Hilal*
£43m	**Kim Min-jae**	*Napoli to Bayern Munich*
£40m	**James Maddison**	*Leicester City to Tottenham*
£38.5m	**Jurrien Timber**	*Ajax to Arsenal*
£36.8m	**Lois Openda**	*Lens to RB Leipzig*
£35m	**Alexis Mac Allister**	*Brighton to Liverpool*
£34.3m	**Sergej Milinkovic-Savic**	*Lazio to Al Hilal*
£34m	**Lucas Hernandez**	*Bayern Munich to PSG*
£33m	**Pau Torres**	*Villarreal to Aston Villa*
£32m	**Nicolas Jackson**	*Villarreal to Chelsea*
£30m	**Joao Pedro**	*Watford to Brighton*
£25.8m	**Felix Nmecha**	*Wolfsburg to B. Dortmund*
£25m	**Mateo Kovacic**	*Chelsea to Manchester City*
£25m	**Jota**	*Celtic to Al Ittihad*
£23m	**Nathan Collins**	*Wolves to Brentford*
£21.4m	**Orkun Kokcu**	*Feyenoord to Benfica*
£21.5m	**Granit Xhaka**	*Arsenal to Bayer Leverkusen*
£21.5m	**Seko Fofana**	*Lens to Al Nassr*
£21m	**Christoph Baumgartner**	*Hoffenheim to RB Leipzig*
£20.7m	**Benjamin Sesko**	*Red Bull Salzburg to RB Leipzig*
£19m	**James Trafford**	*Manchester City to Burnley*
£18.9m	**Abakar Sylla**	*Club Brugge to Strasbourg*
£18.8m	**Lee Kang-in**	*Mallorca to PSG*
£18m	**Kalidou Koulibaly**	*Chelsea to Al Hilal*
£17.2m	**Nicolas Seiwald**	*Red Bull Salzburg to RB Leipzig*
£17.1m	**Tijjani Reijnders**	*AZ to Milan*
£17.1m	**Christian Pulisic**	*Chelsea to Milan*
£17.1m	**Enzo Le Fee**	*Lorient to Rennes*
£17m	**Arda Guler**	*Fenerbahce to Real Madrid*
£16.4m	**Guglielmo Vicario**	*Empoli to Tottenham*
£16.3m	**Bart Verbruggen**	*Anderlecht to Brighton*
£16m	**Edouard Mendy**	*Chelsea to Al Ahli*
£15.6m	**Zeki Amdouni**	*Basel to Burnley*
£15.5m	**Milos Kerkez**	*AZ to Bournemouth*

The key transfers for Europe's top five leagues can be found on pages 55-75.

"You kissed the badge that is worth more than our lives to us and now like a vile cheap mercenary you're selling yourself to the highest bidder"

Inter supporters' group lash out at Romelu Lukaku after the Belgian was linked with a move to Juventus

Ancelotti 'will take over' Brazil in 2024 – CBF chief Ednaldo Rodrigues

Ednaldo Rodrigues, the president of the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF), says that Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti will take charge of Brazil in time for next year's Copa America in the United States.

The 64-year-old Italian was reportedly first approached by Brazil last year, but is set to stay in Spain for the final year of his contract. In the meantime, Fluminense boss Fernando Diniz will serve as the *Selecao* interim manager alongside his club role after the Under-20s manager Ramon Menezes took charge of the side's March friendlies.

Speaking of Diniz, during his presentation as interim boss, Rodrigues said: "His game plan is almost similar to that of the coach that will take over at Copa America, Ancelotti."

Despite Rodrigues' statement, neither Madrid nor Ancelotti have confirmed the move, with the Italian insisting: "I will never talk about Brazil. I'm the Real Madrid coach and I'm staying. I will not speak of this matter anymore."

RODRIGO's contract to sign him from Leeds United for just £3 million.

ROBBIE FOWLER took charge of Saudi Arabian second-tier side Al Qadsiah, after previously managing in Thailand, Australia and India.

United Arab Emirates appointed former South Korea coach **PAULO BENTO** as boss, while German coach **MICHAEL WEISS** took charge of the Philippines national team for the second time.

CONCACAF

Minnesota United snapped up Finland striker **TEEMU PUKKI** on a Designated Player contract after he left Norwich City.

Lionel Messi was joined at his new club Inter Miami by his former Barcelona team-mates **JORDI ALBA** and **SERGIO BUSQUETS**, as well as his old manager for both club and country **GERARDO MARTINO**, who replaced the sacked Phil Neville.

Brazil's new interim coach... Fernando Diniz

Appointments, sackings and loans

OUT

EUROPE

French defender **SAMUEL UMTITI**, who won the World Cup with *Les Bleus* in 2018, became a free agent after having his contract terminated by Barcelona. The centre-back had been on loan at Lecce last season.

Bosnia & Herzegovina need to appoint a new manager for the second time this year after **FARUK HADZIBEGIC**'s six-month spell in charge came to an end following two Euro 2024 qualifying defeats in June.

Former Manchester United and England midfielder **TOM CLEVERLEY** retired from football at the age of 33 following injuries. So too did **VIKTOR FISCHER**, the former Ajax and Denmark winger, aged only 29.

World Cup winner ...Cesc Fabregas

CESC FABREGAS, a World Cup winner with Spain, announced his retirement. The ex-Arsenal, Barcelona and Chelsea midfielder spent last season with Serie B side Como, where he will remain as a youth team coach.

ASIA

Celtic and Australia midfielder **AARON MOOY** announced his retirement at the age of 32.

CONCACAF

Legendary USA winger **MEGAN RAPINOE**, currently in action at the 2023 Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, announced that she will retire from football at the end of the NWSL season this autumn.

United States legend...Megan Rapinoe

"If you don't know what to do, give the ball to Suarez"

Legendary coach Helenio Herrera, who managed Luis Suarez for Barcelona, Internazionale and Spain

OBITUARIES

Luis SUAREZ
(1935-2023)

Luis Suarez, in 1960 the first and only Spaniard to win the Ballon d'Or, was a pioneer in both the tactics and language of football through his exemplary genius for turning defence into attack.

The death of Suarez at 88 was mourned both in his native Spain, where he garnered his fame, and then in his adopted Italy where he earned his fortune and admiration.

With Barcelona he won, all twice over, the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup (forerunner of the Europa League), the Spanish league and Spanish Cup, then, with Internazionale, two European Cups, two Intercontinental Cups and three Serie A crowns. In addition, he guided Spain to their first major trophy, the 1964 Nations Cup (now European Championship).

Those prizes were the tangible rewards from a 20-year career that launched with hometown club Deportivo La Coruna, then marked out by seven years with Barcelona, nine with Inter and a fading three with Sampdoria. For Spain, he scored 14 goals in 32 caps between 1957 and 1972 in an era of far fewer matches and foreign clubs' resistance to international calls.

Suarez was the prototype for tactical transformation. At Barcelona, most notably under Helenio Herrera in 1958-60, Suarez had been a traditional inside-left, working his channel up and down the pitch and both making and taking goals. Herrera, his greatest fan, took Suarez with him to Italy where he evolved into a role ascribed by new-fangled terminology as midfielder. In Herrera's all-conquering Inter, Suarez was the quick-witted brain who masterminded a high-speed transition from defence to attack in a team as ruthless in shutting down opponents as in striking for goal.

For all the praise showered on him, Suarez remained self-deprecating, later claiming that Barcelona signed him from La Coruna in 1954 only by accident, that they had really wanted Uruguayan Dagoberto Moll, and the skinny 19-year-old was a mere makeweight in the deal. Some makeweight; Suarez not only conducted attacks but scored 141 goals in 253 games before being sold to Inter, at Herrera's urging, for a world-record £144,000 fee after Barca's dramatic defeat by Benfica in the 1961 European Cup final.

Herrera's Inter perfected the *Catenaccio* defensive foundation on which Suarez constructed midfield command with the support of workhorse half-backs such as Carlo Tagnin and Gianfranco Bedin, plus the creatively unpredictable Mario Corso. Herrera told his players: "If you don't know what to do, give the ball to Suarez." His most-admired talent was the ability to unleash 40 or 50-metre arrows for the young Sandro Mazzola and Brazilian winger Jair da Costa to chase down. A recent equivalent would have been Andrea Pirlo, as Suarez himself acknowledged.

Spanish icon ...Luis Suarez

Suarez retired in 1973 to a coaching career for which his character was not best suited. He had three short stints on the Inter bench and spells at Cagliari, SPAL and Como in Italy then Deportivo and Albacete in Spain.

He was far more comfortable in a national team framework: Suarez guided Spain to victory over Italy on penalties in the final of the 1986 European Under-21 Championship, and led the seniors to the last 16 of the 1990 World Cup. After that he was far happier delivering his insight for radio and TV in Italy and Spain, particularly Catalonia.

Surprisingly, considering the tempestuous duels in which Suarez led Barcelona and Inter against Real Madrid, he had a high regard for his old rivals. He thought Madrid's Alfredo Di Stefano the greatest of players, saying: "You had to see him on the pitch to believe him." Di Stefano returned the compliment, calling Suarez "The Architect."

Later Suarez was surprised at the warmth of his welcome to the Estadio Bernabeu by Florentino Perez. Suarez said: "I'd never met him but I was in the stand there one day and he came over to shake my hand. He told me his father had watched me play and always said I should have played for Real Madrid."

Inter's former president Massimo Moratti led the tributes on Suarez's death. Father Angelo had been president in the triumphant 1960s and Massimo, back then a student in his early 20s, said: "Luis Suarez was Inter's greatest champion. He brought us a leap in quality; he made us win trophies and titles in Italy, in Europe, in the world. He had extraordinary skills, with a volleyed pass from 50 metres that I have never seen anyone achieve."

The perfect insider's appreciation came from Giovanni Lodetti, an opponent for Milan in the San Siro derbies and later a team-mate and friend at Sampdoria. Lodetti said: "Luisito didn't say much in the dressing room but, when he did, you had to make sure to listen; he understood the game like no-one else."

Keir Radnedge

"Was an absolute honour to have been part of your teams, Craig. Undoubtedly the biggest influence on my career…an outstanding man and human being"

Former Scotland captain Colin Hendry pays tribute to Craig Brown

Scotland hero… Brown at France '98

Craig BROWN
(1940–2023)
Of all the illustrious names to have managed Scotland, from Jock Stein to Alex Ferguson to Walter Smith, none held the post as long as Craig Brown.

A player with Rangers, Dundee and Falkirk and then manager with Clyde, Preston, Motherwell and Aberdeen, his greatest success came with his country, first as the Under-21s boss from 1986 until 1993 and then with the national team for a further nine years. In the record 71 matches that he took charge of, Brown led the team to the dizzying heights of both the Euro '96 and 1998 World Cup finals – an achievement that has grown all the more impressive with age as Scotland have repeatedly failed to qualify for tournaments.

An appearance at Euro 2000 was denied to Brown by defeat to England in the play-offs, despite a 1-0 win at Wembley in the second leg. He stepped down after failing to qualify for the 2002 World Cup.

His achievements as Scotland boss earned him a CBE and many other awards, but Brown was not a typical football manager. Alongside his role with Clyde, he worked as a headmaster at a primary school and lectured in primary education.

That came after a playing career that was far from spectacular and largely blighted by injuries. In 1967, he signed for Stirling after leaving Falkirk but, as he was never fit enough to play a game, he promptly and voluntarily returned his signing-on fee. In the mercenary world of football, it was a gesture that spoke volumes about Brown's integrity.

A gentleman with a great sense of fun, he always maintained an honest ability to laugh at himself. While playing for Dundee, he took the nickname "Bleep" or "Bleeper".

"We were playing Partick Thistle and their goalkeeper made a long clearance which went over our heads," he recalled. "I chased after it and decided to show off a little with my version of a bicycle kick. Instead of clearing the ball, it flew straight up into the air and seemed to hover there for ages. My team-mate Alex Hamilton said it reminded him of Sputnik and suddenly I was being called 'Bleep'."

Once, while having lunch in Glasgow, he was approached by a young man asking for his autograph. There was a scramble for a pen and paper and then as Craig was signing, the young man asked: "You are Walter Smith, aren't you?" Craig's humility was revealed in the fact that he laughed about the incident for many years.

From both assisting and crossing swords with Alex Ferguson, to catching Scotland star John Spencer breakdancing at a nightclub on the eve of a match, Craig went through all his experiences with constant good humour.

Brown was a totally dedicated man, even in preparing for his autobiography. He would record his contributions while waiting at airports or in hotel rooms as he travelled around personally checking every detail for forthcoming matches. I still have the tape of him snoring as he fell asleep while recording, clearly tired out.

Brown was a genuinely unassuming man, thrilled to be in football, amazed by his success and popularity. At the end of his book he simply said this: "I don't know what road I would have travelled down if I had not entered the football profession, but I did, and I often feel that I have the best job in the world."

Bernard Bale, author of Craig Brown: The Autobiography

Cedric ROUSSEL
(1978–2023)
The Belgian striker played for over a dozen clubs including Coventry City and Wolverhampton Wanderers as well as in his home country for La Louviere, Gent, Genk and Mons. In 2003 he won three caps for Belgium, and also played in Italy, Russia, Cyprus and the Netherlands.

Wayne EVANS
(1971–2023)
A Rochdale legend with almost 300 games for the club, who also had spells at Walsall and Kidderminster Harriers.

John BERYLSON
(1953–2023)
The owner and chairman of Championship side Millwall was killed in a car accident in Massachusetts.

Ronnie NOLAN
(1933–2023)
A Republic of Ireland international who played over 300 games for Shamrock Rovers and won several trophies, including four league titles and six FAI Cups.

Stephane DEMOL
(1966–2023)
Centre-back who starred in Belgium's run to the 1986 World Cup semi-finals, scoring in the last-16 win over the Soviet Union.

Horst-Dieter HOTTGES
(1943–2023)
No outfield player has appeared in more Bundesliga games for Werder Bremen than Hottges, who was a key man in the club's first league title win in 1964-65. He was a part of the West Germany side that won the 1974 World Cup, but it was a bittersweet tournament for him; the defender's last-ever international match was the group-stage loss to East Germany.

Chris GARLAND
(1949–2023)
After making his name at Bristol City, Garland played in the First Division for Chelsea and Leicester City before returning to his first club. In 1982, as one of the so-called "Ashton Gate Eight", he tore up his contract in order to save the Robins from liquidation.

Attila ABONYI
(1946–2023)
Born in Hungary, the winger moved to Australia aged ten and went on to become the Socceroos' record scorer.

Georges BERETA
(1946–2023)
Diminutive France international who played for Saint-Etienne during their dominant era of the 1960s and '70s, winning six Ligue 1 titles.

Arda Guler

Turkish wonderkid completes move to Real Madrid

Spanish giants Real Madrid had two good reasons to celebrate when recently securing a €20 million deal for the left-footed Turkish boy wonder Arda Guler.

First and foremost, *Los Blancos* have landed an amazing talent in the 18-year-old ex-Fenerbahce starlet, a Messi-like virtuoso with the ability to run rings around opponents. All quick feet, subterfuge and elusiveness, he can wriggle free in the tightest of spots, he is effective both through the middle and out wide, plays with an incredible clarity of thought and, as the ribbon on the package, takes a brilliant free-kick.

But as well as securing the services of one of the most spectacular young players on the planet, Real also secured a win by beating their eternal rivals Barcelona to Guler's signature. Barca's new sporting director Deco had been very confident of striking a deal for the youngster, only for Real to move unobtrusively to the front of the queue at the eleventh hour.

Spanish football insiders believe that the powers of persuasion of Real chief scout Juni Calafat were instrumental in Guler's decision to head for the Bernabeu. Real are experts in rapid-fire lobbying and negotiation, and when it mattered they moved quicker than Barca.

Real are in far better shape financially than Barcelona and as such were able to offer more, going above and beyond Guler's release clause sum of €17.5m, putting €10m of variables on the table and agreeing to give Fenerbahce 20 per cent of any future sale.

Another Real important trump card was the immediacy of their proposal. While they could bring in Guler straightaway, Barca, inhibited by economic woes and La Liga salary cap issues, could not make the same commitment. A contract with Real meant greater certainty for Guler and his entourage.

Wonderkid...Guler celebrates scoring his first goal for Turkey in June

Word has it that Fenerbahce would have preferred a deal with Barca. Fenerbahce president Ali Koc once sponsored the Camp Nou outfit through one of his companies, the white goods firm, Beko. And Koc has admitted that he would have been happier to sell the youngster and then bring him back on loan for a season.

> As well as securing the services of one of the most spectacular young players on the planet, Real also secured a win by beating their eternal rivals Barcelona to Guler's signature

Unveiling...Guler greets the media in Madrid

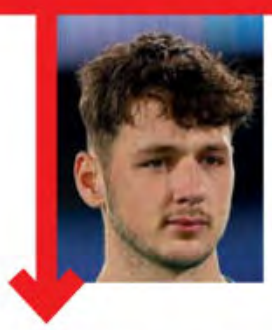
At such a tender age, Guler will obviously face ferocious competition for game-time at Real. In his favour, though, is his maturity and the vital experience he already has gleaned in the game: over 50 first-team outings for Fenerbahce, a taste of the Europa League and four caps with the full Turkish side, making his international bow in November 2022 in a friendly against the Czech Republic. He even scored his first international goal in Turkey's Euro 2024 qualifying win over Wales in June.

"I don't feel pressure," says Guler. "At first there may be a little fear but as soon as I step onto the pitch, I forget everything. I love playing football."

One man who very much admires Guler is the former German international playmaker Mesut Ozil. Once on Real's books himself, Ozil got to know Guler well during a stint at Fenerbahce and last year predicted that the youngster would become a "world star".

"Is there a better number ten than you in Turkey?" Ozil was asked. "Difficult to say," responded the 2014 World Cup winner. "One name comes to mind...his name is Arda Guler."

Nick Bidwell



James Trafford

Goalkeeper marks move to Burnley with starring role in England's European Under-21 Championship victory

A lengthy stint in the third tier of the English game with Bolton Wanderers proved no impediment to England Under-21 goalkeeper James Trafford, who featured front and centre in the Young Lions' triumph at this summer's European Championship.

The Manchester City loanee, on secondment at Bolton for 18 months, looked anything but low grade in his performances this summer at the European finals, keeping a clean sheet in every game and crucially saving both a stoppage-time spot-kick and the subsequent rebound in England's 1-0 victory over Spain in the final; cometh the hour, cometh the penalty-blocking saviour.

Trafford is certainly a confident lad. "I told everyone I was going to save a penalty," he revealed after the final. "I knew I would save it. It was pretty easy really. I told all my mates back home I was going to save one. The clean sheet record [a first in Euro U21 Championships] means a lot to us because it will take a massive effort to get broken. We are a very good team. We believe nobody can score against us and we showed that."

A spot in the U21 Team of the Tournament was richly deserved. As well as his late, late heroics in the final, the young Trafford cut an impressive figure throughout the continental finals, excellent in his command of his box, shot-stopping work, covering duties off his line, angular, explosive athleticism and ball-playing skills.

His exceptional distribution should not come as a surprise. He started out as an outfield player in his native west Cumbria, appearing as a midfielder for Penrith side Frenchfields, hometown club Cockermouth FC and the Carlisle United academy. Then, one fateful day, with Carlisle juniors short of goalkeeping options, he raised his hand to volunteer between the posts. He would never look back and by the age of 12 had been spotted and recruited by Manchester City.

Trafford has never played in the Premier League, or even appeared for City's first team in a cup competition, but that gaping hole in his CV should soon be repaired. Midway through the U21 finals, news emerged that City had accepted a £19 million offer (£14m transfer fee, plus £5m in add-ons) from Burnley ahead of their return to the English top flight. Thanks to this, he is now the third-most expensive keeper in English football history.

Goalkeeper of the Tournament... Trafford in action at the Euro U21s

It says much for Trafford's coolness and ability to mentally compartmentalise that he did not let transfer machinations distract him from his Under-21 mission.

> "I told everyone I was going to save a penalty. I knew I would save it. It was pretty easy really"
>
> James Trafford on his final penalty save

He went to Georgia to win with the Young Lions, not to fret over a move, however enticing.

"You always worry – you're mindful of transfer things going on in the background and how that affects the players," said England U21 boss Lee Carsley. "Three or four of the boys were in this situation. The big thing for us is that James understood that we were there to support him. I think he will be absolutely fine. Wherever he goes, wherever he plays, he's got a top mentality.

"He's been outstanding through the tournament. Not conceding a goal is a great achievement. He's been a really important part of us playing out from the back and playing through. I thought James showed real determination in all of the games to keep the ball out of the net."

The son of a farmer, Trafford just loves to cultivate clean sheet numbers. At Bolton, he became the first-ever Wanderers keeper not to concede in his first four starts for the club and last term compiled no fewer than 26 clean sheets in all competitions.

In his very first media interview as a Bolton employee, he sparked a certain amount of sniggering when he boldly asserted that he would one day be the number one for both Manchester City and England. Fresh from a disappointing loan spell at Accrington Stanley, his self-belief seemed at the time to be somewhat misplaced. A year-and-a-half later, no one is laughing.

Nick Bidwell

Ludogorets

Europe's most dominant club side eyeing more records

With 12 consecutive league title victories, Ludogorets are without doubt the dominant force of Bulgarian football. Only the Sofia clubs, CSKA (31) and Levski (26), have been crowned Bulgarian champions on more occasions, but the capital city sides have barely been able to lay a glove on the Eagles since their ascent to the top flight in 2011. According to the International Federation of Football History & Statistics (IFFHS), they are the "longest active champions" in Europe ahead of Bayern Munich (11) and Red Bull Salzburg (ten).

The 12 titles have been won under seven different head coaches. Georgi Dermendzhiev was the most successful of them, winning three titles and taking the team to the Champions League group stage twice. Ivaylo Petev, the current coach, picked up his third title in his second spell at the club last season, with Stoycho Stoev (twice), Dimitar Dimitrov, Pavel Vrba, Valdas Dambrauskas and Ante Simundza claiming the rest.

Four of the 12 championships have been won by a single point, including last season, when CSKA Sofia were overtaken after leading for much of the season. Petev returned to the club in March with the task of reining them in.

"This was the most difficult and suffered title, more difficult than in 2012 and 2013, but it was the sweetest title. We deserve to win," he said after catching CSKA. "Now our aims for the next season are to win the 13th title in a row, the cup and to qualify for the group stage of the Champions League."

Such ambitions would have been laughable back in 2010, when the club was languishing in the Bulgarian second tier. Nobody could have predicted just how much the club would have been transformed by the takeover of Kiril Domuschiev. Now 54 years old, he is one of Bulgaria's most successful businessmen with an estimated worth – alongside his brother in 2021 – of $4.2 billion according to *Forbes*, with investments in pharmaceuticals, transport, real estate and media.

Record-breaking... Bulgarian champions Ludogorets

With Domuschiev's money, Ludogorets built top-class facilities – both to train in and play at.

Petev was already in place as head coach, and he led the team into the top flight in 2011. The first title followed in 2012, leapfrogging CSKA on the final day with a 1-0 win over Bulgaria's most successful club to seal the trophy in their debut campaign. The domestic treble was completed with victory in the Bulgarian Cup and the Super Cup, thus beginning the most dominant era of any club in the country's history.

> "Now our aims for the next season are to win the 13th title in a row"
> **Ludogorets coach Ivaylo Petev**

Coaches and players came and went, but the winning machine rarely slowed down. In 2014-15, Ludogorets became only the second Bulgarian team (after Levski) to play in the group stage of the Champions League. They did so after a thrilling play-off with Romanian champions Steaua Bucharest. Both teams won at home with late 1-0 victories, sending the tie to extra-time, when Ludogorets goalkeeper Vladislav Stoyanov was sent off. With no subs remaining, Romanian defender Cosmin Motsi went in goal for the shootout, saved two penalties and scored one of his own to send his team through.

Drawn in a group with Real Madrid, Liverpool and Basel, Ludogorets performed admirably. The first-ever group-stage victory for a Bulgarian side was secured by Yordan Minev's winning goal against the Swiss side, while only a stoppage-time penalty deprived them of a point at Anfield. A draw at home to the Reds gave them a return of four points, a tally that they could not better when returning two years later, despite draws with Basel and Paris Saint-Germain.

With their second round qualifier against Olimpija Ljubljana undecided at the time of writing – after disptaching Kosovan champions Ballkani in the first qualifying round – a repeat performance in this season's competition is still very much possible, although they will have a league record in their sights. Only four others teams in European history have won 13 titles in a row, with Skonto Riga of Latvia and Gibraltar's Lincoln Red Imps sharing the all-time record of 14. As for the global game, Vanuatu's Tafea FC's record of 15 is the benchmark.

Rumen Paytashev

Grant-Leon Ranos

Young forward set for a breakout season with both his new club and his national team

In the midst of a delicate rebuild following a couple of under-achieving seasons and the departure of several players of stature, Borussia Monchengladbach are convinced that their newly-acquired teenage forward Grant-Leon Ranos will play a key role in the renaissance they crave at Borussia Park.

The 19-year-old Armenian international, picked up on a free transfer from Bayern Munich this summer, has yet to set foot on a Bundesliga pitch, but already has made a name for himself with his stellar performances for Bayern's reserve team and at senior international level.

Last season in the Regionalliga, the fourth tier of the German pyramid, his tally of 20 goals and 13 assists provided compelling proof of his huge potential and he proved equally devastating when scoring a brace in each of his first two outings for Armenia earlier this year (a 2-2 friendly draw with Cyprus and a shock 4-2 victory in Wales in a Euro 2024 qualifier).

For someone of his tender years and limited experience, his display leading the Armenian line in Cardiff was nothing less than remarkable, brilliant in his runs off the ball, access-all-areas mobility, technical prowess and finishing. His second goal, calmly converting with an elegant prod of his right foot, bore all the hallmarks of a natural executioner. What a night for the teenager, who was only denied a hat-trick by the woodwork after letting fly with a subtle curling effort.

During the post-match press conference, Armenia coach Oleksandr Petrakov preferred to emphasise the mentality of young Ranos: "He is a strong character and very disciplined. We are very happy that we managed to find him and bring him into the squad. I hope he carries on in this vein."

Armenia, surprisingly in contention for a first-ever appearance at a major tournament, are clearly benefitting from the selection policy of scouring the world for players with links to the diaspora. Ranos, born and raised in the Lower Saxony region of northern Germany, has Armenian parents. Goalscoring winger Lucas Zelarayan – who plays for Columbus Crew in the MLS – is an Argentine native, as is Boca Juniors winger Norberto Briasco.

The list goes on; in the last year Armenia have called up players born in Colombia, Nigeria, Greece, Georgia, Serbia, Ukraine and Sweden, while left-back Nair Tiknizyan was a regular for Russia's Under-21s.

Few have made as big an impact as Ranos though, and Gladbach very much want him to give them a similar lift. The Foals have been in a slump for quite some time and, to make matters worse, recently had the heart ripped out of their attacking department, with Jonas Hofmann, Lars Stindl and Marcus Thuram all heading for pastures new. Ranos, capable of cutting a dash at centre-forward or on either flank, should supply a much needed shot of versatility in enemy territory.

Ranos symbolises the supremacy of Bayern in the German game. After starting out in the Hannover academy close to home, he was snapped up at the age of 14 by Dortmund, but only stayed there for 12 months before Bayern came calling. "While I was at Dortmund, Bayern began to show an interest in me," he recalled. "I thought about it for a week and decided that a transfer there would be the best next step for me. Despite having to move away from my family, it was the best choice I could have made."

Will Bayern come to regret losing him? They just might.

Nick Bidwell

Exciting signing... Ranos in action for Gladbach in pre-season

> For someone of his tender years and limited experience, his display leading the Armenian line in Cardiff was nothing less than remarkable

Marquee signing... Al Ittihad present Karim Benzema to their supporters

RIYAL DEAL

The flurry of new signings is just the beginning for the Saudi league, says John Duerden

It was the last day of May when Al Ittihad lifted the Saudi Arabian league trophy in front of over 50,000 ecstatic fans in Jeddah, but much has changed in the weeks since and not just the expansion of the top tier from 16 to 18 teams. The January arrival of Cristiano Ronaldo at Al Nassr, who finished second, garnered plenty of international headlines. In the build-up to the new season, which kicks off in August, the global spotlight has been shining brighter than ever with other big names following in the footsteps of the Portuguese superstar.

Just days after Nuno Espirito Santo led Ittihad to a first title since 2009, Karim Benzema put pen to paper and was heading to Jeddah. It was a significant move in that the second star from Europe was the most recent recipient of the Ballon d'Or and coming from Real Madrid. World Cup winner N'Golo Kante soon became his team-mate, saying goodbye to Chelsea.

Kalidou Koulibaly also left the London club, this time for Al Hilal. Koulibaly, and later Lazio's Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, followed Ruben Neves; this was no 30-something player who had won everything they wanted to win in Europe, but a 26-year-old Portugal international who had been linked to teams such as Barcelona, Manchester United, Liverpool and Newcastle United deciding to head to Riyadh. It was also a significant signing because it was the first in two years by Saudi Arabia's (and Asia's) most successful club. Due to past contractual issues with midfielder Mohamed Kanno, Al Hilal were banned from buying new players and, even before this Saudi spending push started, were always going to have a clear-out in order to bring in some serious foreign talent.

Al Ahli have also been getting in on the act. Jeddah's other giants spent last season focusing on getting out of the second tier for the first time in their history. Promotion was achieved but at the time players refused to celebrate, thinking it was beneath a team that had been champions of Saudi Arabia as recently as 2016. Coach Pitso Mosimane did not agree but the South African was soon on his way out. Al Ahli are now back in the big time and were soon active in the transfer market too, signing goalkeeper Edouard Mendy from Chelsea and Liverpool legend Roberto Firmino.

Runner-up...Cristiano Ronaldo will be aiming to go one better in his first full season

PRIVATISATION

It was fortunate that Ahli came up at the first attempt – helped by the fact that four teams were promoted as the league expanded. In June, they were one of the four clubs, along with Ittihad, Hilal and Nassr, that were taken over by the same Public Investment Fund (PIF) that owns Newcastle United. Al Shabab, who have been one of the top four teams on the pitch in recent years, were left feeling a bit left out and miffed, but then the six-time champions don't have the same fanbase as the selected quartet.

The aim is that with increased investment, more star players, and more expertise and off-the-pitch knowhow, these four will become better-run, more commercially successful and will drive the league forward so it will become one of the top ten in the world in terms of revenue generation. It would be a big step. Historically Saudi clubs have not always been the most professional operators, mainly because they never needed to be. Costs would always be covered and debts cleared by the state, a sheikh or someone higher up. In 2018, for example, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the country's de facto ruler and the man behind this football vision, intervened with over £300m to clear the collective debts of top-tier teams with Al Ittihad and Al Nassr two of the biggest culprits.

> Al Ahli were one of the four clubs, along with Ittihad, Hilal and Nassr, that were taken over by the same Public Investment Fund (PIF) that owns Newcastle United

To help aid with this next step into what the Saudi Pro League has termed a "sustainable future", Michael Emenalo has been appointed as the league's new director of football.

Now with the biggest clubs having huge stars there should be off-the-pitch opportunities. The likes of Ronaldo, Benzema and Firmino bring a high profile and more fans, which should lead into broadcasting rights being sold overseas. That, in turn, should bring sponsorship, especially from outside the country. There has been talk of clubs being open to foreign private equity deals. There have been early signs. Al Nassr have announced a new shirt deal with Nike as well as a summer tour of Japan. There have been a number of firsts in this new Saudi era but an Asian team touring another Asian country is certainly unusual.

SAUDI PRO LEAGUE RECORD TRANSFERS

Ruben **NEVES**	*Wolves (England) to Al Hilal*	*June 2023*	**£47m**
Sergej **MILINKOVIC-SAVIC**	*Lazio (Italy) to Al Hilal*	*July 2023*	**£34.3m**
JOTA	*Celtic (Scotland) to Al Ittihad*	*July 2023*	**£25m**
Seko **FOFANA**	*Lens (France) to Al Nassr*	*June 2023*	**£21.5m**
Kalidou **KOULIBALY**	*Chelsea (England) to Al Hilal*	*June 2023*	**£18m**
Edouard **MENDY**	*Chelsea (England) to Al Ahli*	*July 2023*	**£16m**
Marcelo **BROZOVIC**	*Internazionale (Italy) to Al Nassr*	*July 2023*	**£15.5m**
Matheus **PEREIRA**	*West Brom (England) to Al Hilal*	*August 2021*	**£15m**
Ahmed **MUSA**	*Leicester City (England) to Al Nassr*	*August 2018*	**£14m**
Pity **MARTINEZ**	*Atlanta United (USA) to Al Nassr*	*Sepember 2020*	**£14m**

THE WIDER REGION

That's not the only new development that Asia will have to get used to. Saudi Arabia have long been a powerhouse in the continent – with six World Cup finals appearances, three Asian Cup wins and six Champions Leagues victories – but this is a different level. Politically, power in the continent has been drifting from east to west in recent years and now regional rivals are going to have to get accustomed to this new regime.

Title-winning boss...Al Hilal's Nuno Espirito Santo

Fellow Arab nations Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco have some famous and big clubs but have rarely had the financial muscle of the big Saudi clubs. Now they struggle to match the clout of even the smaller Saudi teams and there are likely to be more and more North Africans heading east. In West Asia, the likes of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar have had more financial power but these leagues are going through something of a quiet time.

In East Asian terms, South Korea has never gone for the big names, with Japan's sole star Andres Iniesta saying *sayonara* in July after five years. China is the obvious comparison but the spending there has largely stopped with clubs focusing on financial survival

SAUDI PRO LEAGUE 2023-24

In order of last season's league table

AL ITTIHAD
Coach: Nuno Espirito Santo
Deservedly won their first title since 2009 under Nuno. After some instances of choking, the Tigers were hard to beat with plenty of firepower. Have added to a strong squad with the likes of Kante and Benzema, and also have some of the most passionate fans in the country.

AL NASSR
Coach: Luis Castro
Top when Cristiano Ronaldo arrived but second at the end, Al Nassr relied too much on individual stars last season. The hiring of Luis Castro has been seen as a little underwhelming, but if Ronaldo and Talisca can start firing together – in addition to Fofana and Brozovic boosting the midfield – then they have what it takes to go one better.

AL HILAL
Coach: Jorge Jesus
The Real Madrid of Asia competed on four fronts last year and paid the price in the league. Have strengthened in the transfer window (after being banned for the last two), with the likes of Koulibaly and Neves, and re-hired Jorge Jesus as coach. With a strong domestic core, they will be there or thereabouts once again.

AL SHABAB
Coach: Vacant
Faded towards the end last season after a strong start with the defence leaking too many goals. The six-time champions have not yet hit the headlines in terms of big-name transfers, and need a new coach after Vicente Moreno joined Almeria, but would love to remind everyone that they are a force to be reckoned with.

AL TAAWOUN
Coach: Pericles Chamusca
Had a great season last time around and were just a point off the top four. Showed they can beat anyone on their day but just lacked consistency. Have been up and down in recent seasons but another top-six, or higher, finish would be very welcome and possible as Chamusca knows the league well.

AL FATEH
Coach: Slaven Bilic
Finished a creditable sixth last season but were never in the running for anything higher. They have the best domestic striker in Firas Al Buraikan, who has demonstrated the benefits of leaving a big club's bench for more playing time, and also hired Slaven Bilic for another spell in Saudi Arabia after his time with Ittihad.

AL ETTIFAQ
Coach: Steven Gerrard
All eyes will be on the English boss, formerly in charge of Rangers and Aston Villa. Recruitment of big-name talent from his European contacts could make a difference, but the club, based in the eastern city of Dammam, will be satisfied with a similar finish and a cup run. Seriously lacked firepower last season.

DAMAC
Coach: Cosmin Contra
The surprise package of the last couple of years and even shock title challengers for a while in 2021-22. Faded last time around but solid foundations have been laid by an unfashionable team, though former Al Ittihad coach Contra, who came in earlier this year, has much to do to reach the next level.

AL TAI
Coach: Kresimir Rezic
Managed a solid ninth-place finish last term thanks to valuable contributions from their African contingent. Zimbabwe forward Knowledge Musona has, though, departed and his goals, assists and all-round work-rate will be missed. The arrival of young Croatian coach Rezic, who impressed with Damac, should help.

Well supported ...fans of Ettifaq, Steven Gerrard's new team

rather than signing big stars, as was the case in the previous decade.

That Chinese activity – in the winter transfer window of 2016-17 the league was the biggest spender in the world – has been offered as a comparison to this new move to the west. Antonio Conte, then the coach of Chelsea, said the Chinese money was dangerous. Not long after, authorities in Beijing were starting to agree and applied the brakes to all the money leaving the country. General economic slow downs played a bigger part, and then came COVID and then bankruptcies and unpaid bills.

The Saudi Arabians are working at a different level – there is stability and there is a greater amount of joined-up thinking. For a start, there is more money. There is over £500 billion in PIF's accounts and it is a crucial part of a long-term vision. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman wants football and sport to be a crucial part of his "Vision 2030", a plan to diversify an economy that is over reliant on oil and also to make the country a sporting hub that is seen as an exciting and modern destination, attractive to tourists, investors and business people.

Spending huge amounts can bring major and rapid change in sport.

Continental force... Al Hilal reached the final of the 2023 AFC Champions League

Already there have been concerns expressed by pundits in England about the disruption to the transfer market. This is shrugged off by Saudi officials who see it as a reaction to the

Back in the top flight...Al Ahli were relegated in 2022 but won back immediate promotion

big four to keep their coach and the former Tottenham boss should be delighted with the additions of Kante and Benzema, plus young Portuguese winger Jota from Celtic.

Al Hilal have rehired Jorge Jesus as coach and usually find a way to bounce back after missing out on the league title. Al Nassr also went Portuguese, hiring Luis Castro who has been tasked with taking Ronaldo's team from second to first. Al Shabab were in the title race for much of last season before fading into fourth. If the Riyadh club are still smarting at not being taken over by PIF, then there is no better way to show their stature than by success on the pitch.

The likes of Damac and Al Taawoun likely don't have the depth of squad to challenge the big boys but would love to sneak into the top four. There could be more excitement at the opposite end of the table. With the extension of the league to 18, there may well be a mega relegation battle. Past seasons have shown that few teams outside the top six can be free from relegation concerns going into a new campaign and few would predict how Steven Gerrard will fare with eastern club Al Ettifaq, who are as likely to be eyeing the top six as worrying about the drop.

Such is life in Saudi Arabian football for all but the big teams. The league is always unpredictable but the influx of some huge names has added extra uncertainty as well as excitement. The world will be watching – not just to see which team wins, but to see which stars settle and which come home.

> The Saudi Arabians are working at a different level – there is stability and there is a greater amount of joined-up thinking. For a start, there is more money

fact that the English Premier League clubs are having to face up to the fact for the first time in a long time that they are not the richest in town.

THE NEW SEASON

For now though, there is football to be played. Despite the big four spending, it is unlikely that Al Ahli can come all the way from the second tier to the title. A place in the top four would be enough.

The top three from last season all have genuine title ambitions, but champions Al Ittihad are the team to beat. Under Nuno Espirito Santo, the Tigers were a well-oiled machine with a miserly defence that conceded just 13 goals and an attack, with talents like Moroccan goal machine Abderrazak Hamdallah and Romarinho, that scored 60. They are also the only one of the

AL RAED
Coach: Igor Jovicevic

Like many clubs, Al Raed, based in the northern city of Buraidah, have changed coaches and this is a first taste of Saudi Arabia for Igor Jovicevic after his time in Ukraine. They have been a mid-table team for some time and that was the same last season too. Need to sort out a leaky defence though.

AL FAYHA
Coach: Vuk Rasovic

Another club that wants, first and foremost, to avoid a relegation battle as it looked hairy at times last time around. Have a wily Serbian coach in Vuk Rasovic and a solid Serbian goalkeeper in Vladimir Stojkovic. Qualified for the 2023-24 Asian Champions League after winning the 2021-22 King's Cup, which may prove to be a distraction.

ABHA
Coach: Czeslaw Michniewicz

The south westerners have established themselves as a top-tier club and are looking forward to a fifth season in the Pro League. Have appointed Czeslaw Michniewicz who led Poland to the second round of the World Cup last December. A top-half finish would be a successful campaign but they need to find goals.

AL WEHDA
Coach: Giorgios Donis

The men from Mecca survived last season as a newly-promoted club on the back of a relatively strong defence, but it was tense and tight at times. Came heartbreakingly close however to winning the 2022-23 King's Cup, with Al Hilal equalising in the final seconds and then winning a penalty shootout 7-6.

AL KHALEEJ
Coach: Pedro Emanuel

In a normal season, with three teams relegated from the Pro League, Al Khaleej would have gone straight back down to the second tier. They survived due to some canny mid-season signings such as Fabio Martins but, after being granted a stay of execution, this year is going to be more difficult for the eastern team.

AL AHLI
Coach: Vacant

The three-time champions bounced straight back up from their first season in the second tier and have made waves by capturing Mendy and Firmino from the English Premier League. Whoever replaces Mosimane in the dugout, a title challenge may be out of reach but fans in Jeddah will be delighted with a top-four finish.

AL HAZEM
Coach: Felipe Gouveia

Back in the top flight after just one season away and success will simply be to stay up. It looks to be a good move to keep Portuguese coach Felipe Gouveia, who was in charge for the promotion season. He has talked of keeping it as tight at the back this season as they managed in the second tier last time out.

AL OKHDOOD
Coach: Jorge Mendonca

Scored for fun during their promotion last season, almost two goals a game, and by far the best of the promoted clubs – although losing top scorer Ousmane Barry is a massive blow. They have shored up the midfield and the backline with some veterans, but it remains to be seen if they can replace Barry's goals.

AL RIYADH
Coach: Yannick Ferrera

Finishing fourth in the second tier suggests that this is going to be a tough season for the capital club and survival would be gratefully accepted. The signing of Knowledge Musona will help, but more will be needed and coach Ferrera's past experience in the country will help.

eyewitness

Mark Gleeson reports

UNITED STATES

The first city of US soccer

St Louis has claimed the title of America's soccer capital for decades, boasting more than a century-long history of playing the game, but it had been almost 50 years since they last had a franchise of their own.

St Louis City, the latest expansion side in Major League Soccer, are wasting no time, however, in trying to make up for the paucity of a professional team and have made a dream start to their first season.

They made an explosive start by winning their opening five games this year, a record for an expansion franchise, and by the halfway stage of the season they were top of the Western Conference and well on their way to a spot in the play-offs.

The new CityPark Stadium has been attracting sell-out crowds, receiving more than 60,000 deposits for the 19,000 available season tickets before the campaign kicked off, and the US national side will be playing there in September, affirming the status of the "Soccer city".

St Louis City are Major League Soccer's 29th franchise, continuing a steady stream of new entrants over recent years as the league continues to gather momentum ahead ▸

Flying start...
St Louis City SC

of the North American-hosted 2026 World Cup.

The ownership group is headed by president Carolyn Kindle Betz – whose grandfather Jack Taylor made billions in the car-hire business – and other members of the family, and is the first female majority-owned team in MLS. They built not only a $460 million stadium but also a $300m training facility next door. There are further plans to redevelop the area close to St Louis' iconic Union Station, including a new HQ for the car hire company.

The process of putting together the club for the city was first muted in 2015 but it was in 2019 that the club was formally announced as the MLS's expansion franchise for 2023. Progress over the last 24 months has come at breakneck speed, starting with the appointment of sporting director Lutz Pfannenstiel, formerly at Bundesliga outfit Hoffenheim.

"I liked it because for me it's the most exciting project in professional football, to build something from nothing. Literally, a piece of white paper. Our training facility was a motorway and the stadium a hole in the ground," he tells *World Soccer* in an expansive office overlooking two training fields.

Pfannenstiel, 50, wanted the club to play in the hard-running, high-intensity style best associated with Ralf Rangnick and the Red Bull organisation, although there are no formal ties between the energy drink company and the team.

Bradley Carnell, a former South Africa international, who played under Rangnick at Stuttgart and had been hired by New York Red Bulls as an assistant coach in 2017, was an obvious candidate for the position of head coach.

"He was a terrier as a full-back and then he did a great job of being the head coach for a short time on an interim basis in New York," explains Pfannenstiel.

"He was for me the number one candidate, because I knew he could implement the philosophy we had in our heads."

Carnell, 46, arrived in St Louis 12 months before the team's MLS debut, beginning the process of recruiting players and forming a team.

"People said to me: 'Don't do an expansion team, it's the most thankless, worst job in the world and the most difficult job in American sports'," he says, but paid them no heed.

St Louis had a reserve side in the youth league MLS NEXT last year, which proved the perfect forum to begin to put it all together.

"The ownership group had the stadium and the training facility up and running long before the very first ball was kicked," adds Carnell.

"If you look at that trajectory and that pathway, we did everything right. St Louis City II was our sort of test dummy and then through the year [2022], we began to bring seasoned pros from Europe on pre-contracts before the new season in 2023. It ensured they had time to settle

Driving midfield force...Eduard Lowen scores a penalty

> "People said to me: 'Don't do an expansion team, it's the most thankless, worst job in the world and the most difficult job in American sports'"
>
> **St Louis head coach Bradley Carnell**

Home of US soccer...St Louis' CityPark Stadium

and acclimatise six months in advance. Again, the ownership group were really open to these ideas and thought outside the box on that."

Marquee signings were former Switzerland goalkeeper Roman Burki, Swedish international defender Joakim Nilsson and the designated player pair of Joao Klauss and midfielder Eduard Lowen – all with Bundesliga experience. Ironically, Nilsson has spent the season out injured while Klauss and Lowen both had several months on the sidelines too. Lowen is seen as the club's midfield driving force, supported by 23-year-old South African international Njabulo Blom, with Burki as skipper. Tim Parker, who played twice for the US five years ago, was selected for the mid-season MLS All-Star match based on his performances.

Yet with all the talent, kicking off in late February was daunting, as Carnell recalls.

"We played the first game away against Austin, who had a fantastic second season of their existence in 2022. It's a very intimidating atmosphere. I sat on the chair in that first changing-room meeting, and I said: 'Boys, you know what the best feeling is here? It's the feeling of being prepared'. We'd been preparing for a full year plus three months.

"I get goose bumps thinking about it," he says of the 3-2 win, secured by an 86th-minute winner from Klauss. "Very emotional, you know, the first three points in the franchise's history. It's like the baby being born now. And we've just taken our first step, right away. To be part of that group, the feeling, the collectiveness, the unity that we had on the night."

For Pfannenstiel, results easily exceed expectation. "We had no real goal when it comes to the position we wanted to finish in the first season," he says. "Rather, the goal was to be competitive from day one. Everybody who comes here, we give them a game. But, of course, you always have in the back of your mind that if things are going well we could sneak into the play-offs. But we never really had that as a clear goal. I say if we are in the contest for a play-off spot until the end of the three weeks before the end of the regular season, then we've done a good job in the first season.

"Most important is to organically build a sustainable football club, which doesn't come in with a big bang and then disappear again."

Pfannenstiel says the club is "built on three pillars" – a focus on the local community, their academy and the first team.

"We want to give kids an opportunity to play football, those who can't afford it. Here in America, there is a pay-to-play system. We are now one of the top five academies in the country in only two years, which is incredible. And it has a lot to do with the talent we have in St Louis. It was always a city which historically produced lots of players."

For the first team there was no set target for the first year, save for settling in. "So far we have had no real problems other than a few performance bumps that would be normal in a first-ever season. First in the league in a good Western Conference after 21 matches is pretty good," he says with a smile that acknowledges the understatement.

Continuing with the trajectory will ensure a top seeding for the play-offs, where nine teams per conference advance. The key games at their end of the play-offs remain single-elimination matches hosted by the higher-seeded team and are scheduled for late November and early December.

ST LOUIS: THE HOME OF US SOCCER

Two from "Lou"...Josh Sargent and Tim Ream in Qatar

St Louis was the Midwest's soccer hotbed, with its own league from as early as 1881 and a national champion in 1920 when local club Ben Millers became the first team from outside the East Coast to win the US Open Cup (or the National Challenge Cup, as it was known then).

Five of the American team that beat England 1-0 at the 1950 World Cup in Brazil came from St Louis, namely goalkeeper Frank Borghi, Charles Colombo, Harry Keough, Gino Pariani and Frank "Pee Wee" Wallace, and there were two from "Lou" at the last World Cup in Qatar – Tim Ream and Josh Sargent.

In college soccer, Saint Louis University won or shared ten of the first 15 NCAA men's soccer titles while the St Louis Stars competed in the old North American Soccer League from its inauguration in 1967 to 1977 before the franchise moved to the West Coast and was renamed California Surf.

While big-name imports like Pele, Franz Beckenbauer, George Best and Johan Cruyff were drawn to other franchises in the league, Stars concentrated on local talent and were NASL runners-up in 1972, but had nothing of the excitement that St Louis City have whipped up in the city.

Captain... Roman Burki claims a cross

St Louis City head coach...Bradley Carnell

BALLS
8
10

eye witness

Steve Menary reports

GUERNSEY

The Island Games

Jersey won the Island Games football tournament to the chagrin of their neighbours and hosts Guernsey and go into their 2023-24 league season with a major title under their belt. For other sides at the Games, the wait for another meaningful fixture will be significantly longer.

As "*Don't Look Back in Anger*" by Oasis echoed around the Corbet Field sports ground in St Sampson, Greenland's players slumped back into their dug-out after losing their winner-takes-all final Group C game against Bermuda.

Trailing by two goals, the Arctic side had equalised through a brace from teenage sensation Nemo Thomsen only to be caught pressing for a winner. In a thrilling game, the Caribbean side caught Morten Rutkjaer's side out on the left flank and Blaiz Hall scored the winner in the 81st minute.

"I'm angry about the result but also very proud. It was a very good level and two teams that wanted to play football," said a phlegmatic Rutkjaer, Greenland's Danish manager, after consoling his players, who matched a Bermuda U23 team featuring players with full international experience, such as Harry Twite, who featured in the latest CONCACAF Nations League campaign.

The assured teenager Twite should have a long senior career at international level ahead, but Thomsen – scorer of 26 goals as Kolding won Denmark's U19 tournament in 2022-23 – must wait for the next Island Games in Orkney in 2025.

The exciting Thomsen, who surely has a professional future in the club game, was also the difference in the penultimate Group C match, when Greenland struggled to break down the Norwegian island of Froya. At half-time, Rutkjaer moved Thomsen from a deeper role to leading the line and he scored again, finishing the Games with six goals in four matches. Greenland, who started with seven players aged 23 or under against Bermuda, will be in a good position to challenge for gold next time.

The latest Games had been delayed by two years due to COVID and with no football in 2019 due to a shortage of pitches in Gibraltar, the 2023 tournament was the biggest football event for six years for the likes of Greenland and other places ignored by FIFA and the continental confederations, such as the British South Atlantic territories of St Helena and the Falkland Islands.

On the same day Greenland were staying in contention ▸

against Froya, St Helena were being outmuscled 3-0 by the Maltese island Gozo at The Track – home of club side Bellville Wanderers – to lose any chance of getting out of Group D.

St Helena had never competed at representative level until 2019 due to the lack of transport from their tiny island, which is home to 4,000 people and a thriving six-team league, but relied on a mail boat to Bristol until an airport opened in 2017.

A St Helena side attended an unofficial interim Games tournament in 2019 after a fund-raiser and returned for their official debut in Guernsey. They finished last but were never embarrassed. Against a Gozo side featuring four players with U21 caps for Malta, the difference was a striker to hold the ball up.

"They looked like athletes and we looked like footballers," sighed Gary Davies, holder of 85 caps for England's disabled XI and head of customs & immigration on St Helena until June, after the defeat.

Davies has a UEFA B coach licence and journeyed to Guernsey to work as the side's coach. He adds: "In St Helena, they are playing against people they have known al their life. Out here, they have seen a different sort of game management and gamesmanship."

Like their South Atlantic neighbours, the Falkland Islands also finished winless but briefly threatened a huge upset in their penultimate Group B match against the Welsh island of Ynys Mon, who hosted and won the unofficial tournament in 2019.

At Corbet's Field, Patricio Balladares scored a superb free-kick in the opening minutes to put the Falklanders ahead The lead only lasted 20 minutes though, before Ynys Mon hit back and then cruised to a 4-1 lead at half-time. In the second half, a more composed Falkland side only conceded once.

Island Games chairman...Jorgen Pettersson

"That goal came too early and we'd not even got into our shape," said Troyd Bowles, chief pilot in the Falkland's Air Service and the team's manager.

Nobody's tournament ended at the group stage, with play-off matches played to establish the exact placing of every team. With both South Atlantic sides finishing bottom of their groups, a derby in the final placement games was possible, which would have thrilled the Falkland's veteran football commentator Patrick Watts, who relayed commentary back to Stanley via his phone at all the games.

That was not to be though and instead St Helena finished last after losing 4-2 to Froya, while the Falkland's drew 1-1 with the Swedish island of Aland but lost on penalties to finish 14th. Both head back to the South Atlantic with a likely two-year wait before another meaningful game.

Other sides have managed to play more regularly through competitions such as the UEFA Regions Cup for amateur and semi-professional players. Gozo have represented Malta in this competition, while the Isle of Man and both Channel Islands have previously qualified to represent England.

The Manxmen went to Guernsey as holders having won the last official Island Games back in 2017, beating Greenland 6-0 in the final. Unlike

Team talk...Greenland manager Morten Rutkjaer addresses his players

the two Channel Islands, the holders only brought a handful of players from their semi-professional side; FC Isle of Man play on the mainland in the North West Counties League.

While the sometimes bitter rivalry between the two Channel Islands gave the tournament an edge, many sides like the Isle of Man see the Games as an opportunity for development or just a chance to play representative football.

In opting to give more players experience at a big tournament, the Isle of Man reduced their chances of getting out of Group B and lost to both Ynys Mon and the 2005 winners, Shetland. Ynys Mon's only official gold medal was in 1999 but a youthful side playing good football then upset Bermuda 2-0 in their semi-final in Saint Martin to set up a chance of a second win.

The final was hampered off the field by the absence of Guernsey, who crashed out in the group stage. The hosts played all their matches at The Track and more than 4,000 people packed in to see Tony Vance's side resort to a long-ball game to battle to a 1-0 win in their opening game against the Western Isles. Guernsey were much improved for their second game, sweeping aside the Swedish island of Aland 4-1, only to be upset by two-time winners the Isle of Wight, who in turn then fell short against Elliot Powell's Jersey side.

In a frenetic final against Ynys Mon, the Welsh Island scored first and were 2-1 up after just 16 minutes but Jersey edged back in front by half-time and a goal three minutes from time by Luke Watson confirmed a 5-2 win and a fourth gold medal. The victory capped a fine season for Powell, who led St Peter to the Jersey league title in 2022-23.

Unlike Guernsey, Jersey once aspired to playing at a more senior representative level and persisted with a bid to join UEFA, which was ultimately rejected in 2018. Jersey Bulls subsequently followed Guernsey into the English league system but are stuck in the Combined Counties, which is a division below Guernsey.

Guernsey FC had joined the English pyramid in 2011 and currently play in the Isthmian League but have never entertained wider representative ambitions outside of the Muratti Vase (played between the Channel Islands) and the Island Games.

A third Channel Island should have been present at the Island Games, but Alderney, who have entered five times previously, missed out due to the tournament's growth in popularity. With the games played over six days, a tight schedule meant that only 16 out of the 19 applicants could be accepted. After drawing lots, the Estonian island of Saarema pulled out, before the Norwegian isle of Hitra joined Alderney in missing out.

"It's heartbreaking," said Island Games chairman Jorgen Pettersson on the touchline at The Track. "In Hitra, their strong sport is football and then we did not have volleyball, which is their second sport, as this was not chosen for 2023. What can you do? FIFA have the World Cup over five weeks – we do all this in six days."

> "FIFA have the World Cup over five weeks – we do all this in six days"
>
> **Island Games chairman Jorgen Pettersson**

Unlike the proliferation of bodies such as the Confederation of Independent Football Associations (ConIFA) that provide a platform for what can best be described as "alternative representative football", the Island Games has proved a real stepping stone to FIFA membership.

The Faroe Islands won gold in 1989 and 1991, while Gibraltar emulated this feat in 2007, before both joined FIFA in 1988 and 2016 respectively. They no longer compete in the Island Games football but continue to send athletes in other disciplines.

Greenland are following the same route with a bid to join CONCACAF but would be less likely to turn their back on the Island Games, which has 24 members and is likely to be oversubscribed at football again in 2025, illustrating the competition's growing popularity.

Ynys Mon...the Welsh island played in a Wales kit

Teenage sensation...Greenland's Nemo Thomsen rounds Froya's goalkeeper in the group stage

GOING UP

Signing for Barcelona is the latest step in a long upwards journey for Ilkay Gundogan

Words: Ryan Baldi

There is a fitting symmetry between where Barcelona will play their home games this season and the arduous path their latest star midfield signing has traversed.

While the Camp Nou undergoes its drastic renovation, Xavi's La Liga champions will play their home matches at the Estadi Olimpic Lluis Companys for the 2023-24 campaign. Originally constructed as part of Barcelona's (unsuccessful) bid to stage the 1936 Olympics, the 55,000-capacity arena eventually staged the Summer Games in 1992 and is situated on Montjuic, the hill that overlooks the city's harbour. Ilkay Gundogan, who signed for Barca after his Manchester City contract expired in June, has already climbed mountains to reach his dream destination.

Born in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, Gundogan grew up supporting Schalke and represented the club as a child, but the first setback of his career arrived when, aged just eight, he was released by his beloved team.

"It was a huge dream of mine to be able to play for Schalke," he told *RevierSport* in 2011. "For it to be over so quickly was not easy to take."

He rebounded and, as a teen, impressed with Bochum's second-string and youth teams before signing for Nuremberg in 2009. An attacking midfielder often deployed on the right wing, Gundogan starred for Nuremberg for two seasons, catching the eye of Borussia Dortmund, Schalke's great rivals, who swooped to sign the then-20-year-old in 2011.

At the Signal Iduna Park, Gundogan was reimagined under Jurgen Klopp as a central midfielder, possessing box-to-box energy and crisp, incisive passing. He was key to a Bundesliga title triumph in his maiden campaign with BVB and, in 2013, helped Dortmund reach the Champions League final. Klopp's side were ultimately defeated by rivals Bayern Munich in the Wembley showpiece, but Gundogan's performance stood out, capped by a coolly dispatched penalty in the 2-1 loss.

By this stage, the young German international was one of the most sought-after midfielders in Europe. But just weeks after his star turn in club football's most prestigious fixture, another setback struck: a back injury kept him out of action for a full year.

Barca boy...Gundogan during his presentation at the Joan Gamper training ground

Title winner... Gundogan during his first season at Dortmund

"I was really scared," Gundogan said of the back problem and the surgery it necessitated, "and I didn't know if I would ever be able to play football again."

He returned to the field during the 2014-15 season and was again courted by some of the continent's biggest clubs by the end of the following campaign. Misfortune was lurking once more, however: a dislocated knee during training and a resultant patella tendon injury.

That injury wasn't enough to deter Pep Guardiola, though. The freshly appointed Manchester City manager, familiar with the Dortmund midfielder from his time in charge of Bayern, made Gundogan his first signing for the Premier League champions in the summer of 2016, despite the fact he could not play until the second month of the upcoming season.

Gundogan made his City debut on September 14, winning a penalty that Sergio Aguero converted in a 4-0 Champions League victory over Borussia Monchengladbach. He quickly became a central feature of Guardiola's side, scoring five goals in his next 15 games. Then, in just his tenth Premier League appearance, he suffered a ruptured cruciate ligament in the first half of an eventual 2-0 home win against Watford in December. He would not play again for nine months.

Unlike with the doubts that engulfed him during his recovery from his back injury three years earlier, though, Gundogan this time was strengthened by the gruelling process of overcoming the ACL tear. It gave him a fresh perspective on his career, on his life.

"It sounds sarcastic, but if I had to stop now, I would say: 'OK, I have to stop,'" he told *The New York Times* during his rehabilitation from surgery to repair his knee. "It would not be the end of the world. I will stop and do something else.

"When I had my back injury, I was down. I was nearly dead, or felt like it. But now I am more relaxed. I feel quite OK, maybe more like an adult. It has affected me. It has made me more mature. Maybe this was an experience I had to have."

His first game back, coincidentally, was against Watford, coming off the bench in a 6-0 drubbing of the Hornets in September 2017. He has enjoyed a comparatively clean bill of health ever since, averaging 48 appearances per season over the course of the following five full campaigns. And without the interruptions of major injuries, Gundogan showed exactly why Guardiola had such faith in him from the outset. While past setbacks might have robbed him of some of the burst through the middle third that once marked out his game, Gundogan excelled in various roles within City's midfield thanks to his technique in confined spaces, his precise passing and the intelligence with which he navigates the pitch.

Big-game player... Gundogan scores in the 2013 Champions League final

Devastated...Jurgen Klopp consoles Gundogan after the defeat to Bayern

> Gundogan was reimagined under Jurgen Klopp as a central midfielder, possessing box-to-box energy and crisp, incisive passing

Gundogan was elected by his team-mates to succeed Fernandinho as captain at the Etihad in 2022 and he departs as a legendary figure of the club's modern era, capped by leading City to the treble.

"I can only imagine what the fans thought when this quiet guy with the funny name arrived here in Manchester for a lot of money and he was limping around on crutches at the unveiling," he wrote in a departure letter addressed to City's fans in *The Players' Tribune*.

"Well, all I can say is...I came here limping on one foot, but I leave here feeling like I am flying in the clouds."

The Germany playmaker's move to Barcelona has been years in the making. He was first linked with a move to the club in 2013 and he came close to joining the Catalan giants again two years later. City were keen to maintain his services but, having become a father in March with the birth of his son, Kais, Gundogan appears to have opted for the greater stability provided by La Liga's champions – Barca offered the 33-year-old a two-year contract with the option of an additional year, whereas City's offer was only for a single guaranteed year.

His new surroundings come with

City hero...Gundogan clutches last season's UEFA Champions League trophy

a degree of familiarity. Gundogan underwent his 2016 ACL surgery in Barcelona, where he was under the care of Dr Ramon Cugat, who also repaired the knee of his new manager, Xavi, in 2005. Gundogan stayed in Barcelona for a month after the operation, living in an apartment on one of the city's most famous avenues, Passeig de Gracia, while he began his recovery. He even watched Barcelona play at the Camp Nou during this time.

> "If I was going to move, there is only one club in the world that made sense. It was Barcelona or nothing"

"If I was going to move, there is only one club in the world that made sense," he said. "It was Barcelona or nothing.

"Ever since I was a little kid, I dreamed of wearing that shirt some day. I am confident that I have a few more years left at the highest level, and I just want to help bring Barcelona back to where they deserve to be."

Gundogan arrives into a squad not short of midfield options, but he brings with him a skillset and experience level that will make him a tremendous asset for Xavi. With the departure of long-time midfield anchor Sergio Busquets, Gundogan has the passing ability and savvy positioning to help conduct play from deep, or he could comfortably operate further forward to share some of the creative burden previously shouldered by 20-year-old Pedri. He also has a pre-loaded on-field understanding with Barca's star striker, Robert Lewandowski, from their time together at Dortmund.

Although never a consistently prolific goalscorer, Gundogan has proven that, when his role dictates,

Key player ...Gundogan was Guardiola's first signing at Manchester City

he can provide firepower from midfield, as evidenced during the 2020-21 season, when a run of 11 goals in 12 games helped shoot City from ninth before Christmas to seven points clear at the top in February.

He has an uncanny sense of the big occasion, too, with a long track record of scoring important goals. This can be traced back to his time with Nuremberg, when he scored in the second leg of a 2009-10 relegation play-off victory over Augsburg. He has a Champions League final goal to his name and, with City, he scored two goals in five minutes versus Aston Villa on the last day of the 2021-22 season to secure the title when it looked like Guardiola's side were letting it slip, coming back from 2-0 down as they pipped Liverpool to the Premier League crown. And, of course, most recently he set an FA Cup final record when he scored after just 12 seconds against Manchester United, the first strike of a brace to help City overcome their local rivals at Wembley.

"I know there's going to be a lot of pressure at Barcelona," Gundogan says. "But I love pressure. I love to get out of my comfort zone.

"I was not looking for an easy landing. I was looking for a new challenge. That's what this next chapter is all about."

A new challenge. Another hill to climb.

Welcome to Barca...club president Joan Laporta unveils Gundogan

WONDERBOY

How Jude Bellingham's performances at Borussia Dortmund convinced Real Madrid to make him their latest *Galactico*

Words: Nick Bidwell

If there was a moment when Real Madrid developed an irresistible urge to sign England midfielder Jude Bellingham, it might have occurred in October of last year, when the teenage engine-room all-rounder – only 19 at the time – produced a man-of-the-match display for Borussia Dortmund in a 4-1 victory at Sevilla in the Champions League group phase.

That night, Bellingham bestrode proceedings at the Sanchez Pizjuan like a colossus, pressing with fire and brimstone, constantly breaking into advanced areas and generally setting a fine skipper's example, filling in for the unavailable Marco Reus and Mats Hummels. The highlights of his evening's work? Undoubtedly the part he played in Dortmund's first two goals: a superbly struck cross-field ball paving the way for Raphael Guerreiro to scamper on and fire home, then going on a jinking mission in the inside-left channel before adroitly applying a cool finish.

Any new Real Madrid player has to be able to handle the weighty demands of the Champions League, and Bellingham certainly met that criteria with Dortmund last season. Not only was he the team's top scorer in the competition with four goals in seven starts, he imperiously ran the show in the middle of the park, a spectacular mix of the physical, technical and cerebral.

Victorious in 11 Champions League matches for Dortmund over three seasons, Bellingham is currently the only BVB professional in history to have achieved as many wins at the UEFA top table while still a teenager.

Acquired from mother club Birmingham City in the summer of 2020 for an initial €25 million fee, Bellingham has benefitted enormously from his time at Dortmund. At the Westfalenstadion he enjoyed guaranteed game time, could cut his teeth in the Champions League and was given all the necessary tools and guidance to polish and refine his game, especially to widen his playing repertoire and take on more responsibility.

Nominally deployed as defensive midfielder or a number eight in the Dortmund line-up, he developed in the Bundesliga into a sort of deluxe box-to-box operative, someone who can do it all: win the ball, pass it with unerring accuracy, dribble and join the attacking fun, either ending up in an advanced wide area or in the red zone itself.

In a Bundesliga still driven by physical potency, desire and individual battles, the youngster from the West Midlands (his hometown is Stourbridge, 12 miles west of Birmingham) has been in his element. The stats tell their own excellent story: last season he won more duels than

FIFA
2022
UEFA FOUNDATION
15 de junio de 2022
Emirates
FLY BETTER

Eye-catching... Bellingham scores against Sevilla in last season's Champions League

anyone else (482), ran 10.49km per game on average, and came fifth nationally in the intensive run charts (with a total of 2,526). He proved outstanding in possession too, number one in the league for successful dribbles and recording a fine 84.9 per cent pass completion rate.

Deservedly, he was voted Germany's Player of the Year for 2022-23, though the award would not have compensated for Dortmund's bitter near-miss in the Bundesliga title race: they would have wrapped up their first national title in 11 years if they had beaten Mainz on the final weekend of the season, but surprisingly only managed a draw, allowing Bayern Munich to overtake them in a goal-difference photo-finish. Worse for Bellingham, a knee injury meant he was reduced to cheerleading from the bench, watching on as his hopes of the perfect exit crumbled in front of him.

Bellingham, conscious that the Dortmund chapter of his career was about to come to an end, sat disconsolate and tearful on the pitch at the end of the game. So close to glory, only to have it snatched away at the last hour. Dortmund coach Edin Terzic, father figure to all his charges, offered as many sympathetic words as he could muster. "Everybody could see how much it would have meant to Jude

Tearful farewell ...Bellingham acknowledges the Dortmund supporters after the final-day draw with Mainz

Father figure... Dortmund coach Edin Terzic comforts Bellingham

to play today. He'd worked so hard to make himself available for this match, but at midday he told me that he wasn't 100 per cent fit. If we had a chance of the title, he was one of the most significant reasons for it. He's a winner and he'll go on to win many more trophies in the future. Of that I'm sure."

How then to assess Bellingham's Dortmund legacy? Trophies might have been thin on the ground, with only the 2021 DFB-Pokal Cup gleaming in the cabinet. But he definitely made a considerable impact in the Ruhr, his consistency, midfield substance, will-to-win and leadership combining in one intoxicating brew to make the *Schwarz-Gelben* thoroughly more competitive. Week-in and week-out, he was a barnstorming presence and it says everything about his value that over the past three seasons no other player aged 20 or under has racked up more game-time in one of Europe's top five leagues. His departure for the Bernabeu has clearly left a massive hole in the Dortmund ranks. So much so that the BVB management believe it will take two high-quality signings to replace him.

Here was a young player very much in a hurry. Only 18 when he reached the milestone of 50 games in the Bundesliga and barely 19 at the time of his 40th win with Dortmund in the German top flight.

The Dortmund faithful certainly will miss Bellingham and his almost limitless radius of involvement. Little wonder that chants of "Juuuude" often used to echo around the Westfalenstadion. In the young England star, Dortmund supporters saw a player who readily identified with club values: the grit, the endeavour, the honesty.

Not that his stint at Dortmund was wall-to-wall comfort, all adulation and rave reviews. In his very first Champions League start, a 3-1 away defeat at Lazio in October 2020, he struggled to make any sort of impact in the opening 45 minutes and would not reappear for the second-half. Bellingham later admitted he could have done better and said he respected the decision of head coach Lucien Favre, adding that the latter had needed to change tack with his side 2-0 down. Keen to protect the youngster, Dortmund director of sport Michael Zorc insisted that form fluctuations were only to be expected with a 17-year-old. "There are no differences of opinion; everyone knows that Bellingham has a bright future ahead of him."

Towards the end of 2021, Bellingham found himself waist-high in disciplinary hot water, dragged into the dock after laying into referee Felix Zwayer following a controversial 3-2 defeat at the Westfalenstadion to arch-rivals Bayern Munich. Enraged by what he saw as Zwayer's part in Dortmund's downfall – rejecting a pair of Dortmund spot-kick appeals and awarding Bayern a penalty when Mats Hummels was deemed to have handled – Jude unwisely chose to vent his spleen in a TV interview, a diatribe centred around a six-month ban Zwayer served back in 2005 following a match-fixing scandal: "You give a referee that has match fixed before, the biggest game in Germany. What do you expect?"

The sports court of the DFB, the German federation, duly declared Bellingham to be guilty of "unsportsmanlike behaviour", fining him €40,000. Zwayer described the Englishman's comments as "disparaging and respect-less", and demanded that he meet

His departure for the Bernabeu has clearly left a massive hole in the Dortmund ranks. So much so that the BVB management believe it will take two high-quality signings to replace him

Numbers game... Bellingham will wear Madrid's No.5 shirt, previously worn by Zinedine Zidane

Press pack... Jude meets the media in Madrid

Jude face-to-face for an apology. "There's not a great prospect of that," replied Dortmund chief executive Hans-Joachim Watzke.

Bellingham's anti-Zwayer outburst, fuelled by frustration, was an out-of-character blip. Normally the youngster is so composed and level-headed, so self-aware and thoughtful.

This extraordinary maturity has been at the very core of his rise to football prominence. Without it, he would not have appeared for England's U15s when just 13, become Birmingham City's youngest-ever first-teamer (16 years and 38 days), would not have taken the Bundesliga by storm as a teen and would not have made his full England debut (in a friendly against the Republic of Ireland in November 2020) at the age of only 17 years and 136 days, thus becoming the country's third-youngest full international. Nor would he have looked the part for the Three Lions at the 2022 World Cup, aged only 19.

> Maturity has been at the very core of his rise to football prominence. Without it, he would not have appeared for England's U15s when just 13 [or] become Birmingham City's youngest-ever first-teamer

From the moment he kicked his first ball in earnest – joining the Birmingham City academy at the age of eight – Jude proved himself to be the most accomplished of early learners, notably scoring 15 goals in one half for the Under-10s. Such was his vast potential, he grew accustomed to competing against older, bigger and stronger boys. And in order to close that gap, he quickly came to realise that the only way to survive was to play smarter, being cuter in his movement, thinking ahead and processing quick, sound decisions.

"Very early on, I had to learn to read a game, offensive as well as defensive," he explained in an interview with *Kicker* magazine in October 2020, not long after joining Dortmund. "Looking back, that's really helped me. Attack-wise, the head is key to most decisions. I'm always analysing games. Looking to see where the gaps are for me to run or pass into. Should I have opted for a dribble in such a situation? Could I have taken a couple more steps forward with the ball?"

Pep Clotet, the former Birmingham City manager, who handed Jude his first-team debut in August 2019 (in a League Cup tie versus Portsmouth), says the decision to incorporate Jude was one that made itself. "Jude had done well in all the junior categories and had played for England Under-15s and Under-16s," Clotet explained to the Spanish daily *Marca*. "In the 2018-19 pre-season, I requested that he train with the senior squad. I could see he was a footballer who could carry the workload. At youth-team level, it was clear he had the mental quickness, tactical intelligence and exquisite technique. When he broke forward at pace, he was very dangerous. We just had to see whether he could maintain that rhythm and level with the pros.

ENGLISHMEN IN MADRID

Bellingham is the sixth English player to join Real Madrid

Laurie CUNNINGHAM
(1979-1984)

Steve McMANAMAN
(1999-2003)

David BECKHAM
(2003-2007)

Michael OWEN
(2004-2005)

Jonathan WOODGATE
(2004-2007)

"From the first day of pre-season, he surprised us. What struck us was that he had the footballing and physical capacity of a 23 or 24-year-old. Early that season I decided to try him in a League Cup tie. It was an opportunity to blood some of the youngsters we saw as the future of the club. I used him as an attacking midfielder just behind the striker and he had a great game.

"A few weeks after, I brought him on as substitute in a game we were losing against Stoke, and he scored the winner. It was a spectacular start, which generated a great deal of excitement from the supporters. At the age of 16, he played 44 games and even then, he wanted more. I left him out for a couple of weeks because of a foot injury – he told me he could play through the pain."

> "I left him out for a couple of weeks because of a foot injury – he told me he could play through the pain"
>
> Bellingham's former manager Pep Clotet

That would be his one and only season for Birmingham in the Championship. Despite plenty of interest from Premier League big-hitters, he chose to take the expat route, signing on the dotted line for Dortmund, European football's most attractive destination for hot young prospects. A vital part of the Dortmund charm offensive was the claim that they would help make him a full international within two years. In fact, the process took just four months. Prodigies do not dawdle.

Wonderboy...Jude celebrates scoring against Stoke City

From the ***archives***

In our August 2021 issue, Bellingham's former coach Mike Dodds explains how the young starlet's position evolved...

Bellingham's early youth career was spent as a striker, emulating his dad's scoring feats. But Birmingham's coaches believed he could offer more from a deeper position. In one conversation with a 12-year-old Bellingham, Dodds asked the pre-teen what role he envisaged for himself. "I want to be a No.10," Bellingham replied.

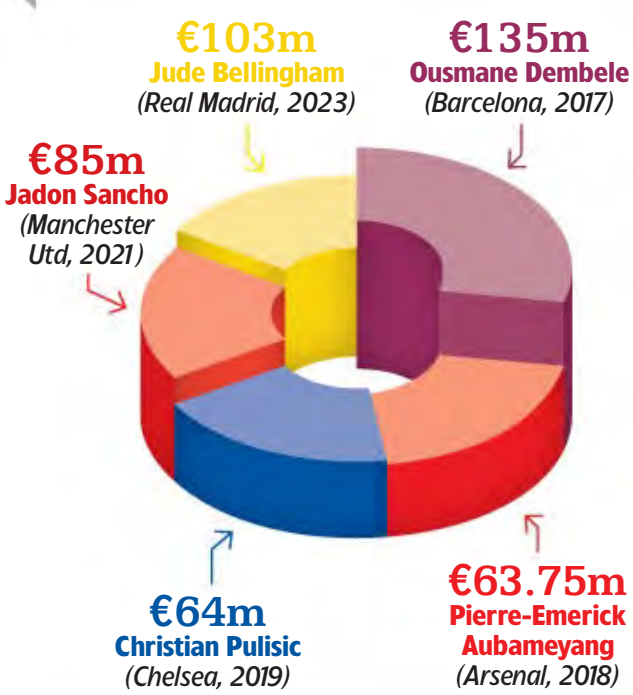
"I think you should be a No.22," Dodds countered, flummoxing the youngster. The coach's idea was that Bellingham should not only transition into a midfield role, but one that would incorporate aspects of the remits of a defensive midfielder (traditionally a No.4 in England), a box-to-box runner (No.8) and a creator in the attacking third (No.10) hence a No.22. "He idolised the likes of Steven Gerrard and Wayne Rooney," Dodds says. "One of my favourite players was Paul Gascoigne. Gazza could do everything. He could control the ball from deeper areas. He could score. He could create in higher areas. I used to talk to him a lot about Gascoigne. Those three players were the players who we talked about when we reviewed his programme.

"We always reviewed around, 'Were you a 22 today? Did you defend? Did you run around? Were you a box-to-box eight? Were you a ten?' He held on to that, hence the reason why he wears the No.22 shirt."

RIGHT: No.22... Bellingham's all-round midfield role

Jude Bellingham

DORTMUND'S BIGGEST SALES



MADRID'S BIGGEST SIGNINGS

ENGLAND

24
CAPS

1
GOALS

ENGLAND CAPS WHILE AT A NON-ENGLISH CLUB

55	**David Beckham** *(Real Madrid, LA Galaxy, Milan)*
39	**Owen Hargreaves** *(Bayern Munich)*
34	**Paul Gascoigne** *(Lazio, Rangers)*
33	**David Platt** *(Bari, Juventus, Sampdoria)*
32	**Terry Butcher** *(Rangers)*
28	**Mark Hateley** *(Milan, Monaco, Rangers)*
25	**Kevin Keegan** *(Hamburg)*
24	**Jude Bellingham** *(Dortmund)*
24	**Gary Lineker** *(Barcelona)*
22	**Trevor Francis** *(Detroit Express, Sampdoria)*
22	**Ray Wilkins** *(Milan)*

ENGLAND'S YOUNGEST POST-WAR PLAYERS

2006 **THEO WALCOTT** 17 years 75 days

2003 **WAYNE ROONEY** 17 years 111 days

2020 **JUDE BELLINGHAM** 17 years 136 days

2012 **RAHEEM STERLING** 17 years 342 days

WorldSoccer

NEXT MONTH

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- TALKING POINTS & ANALYSIS
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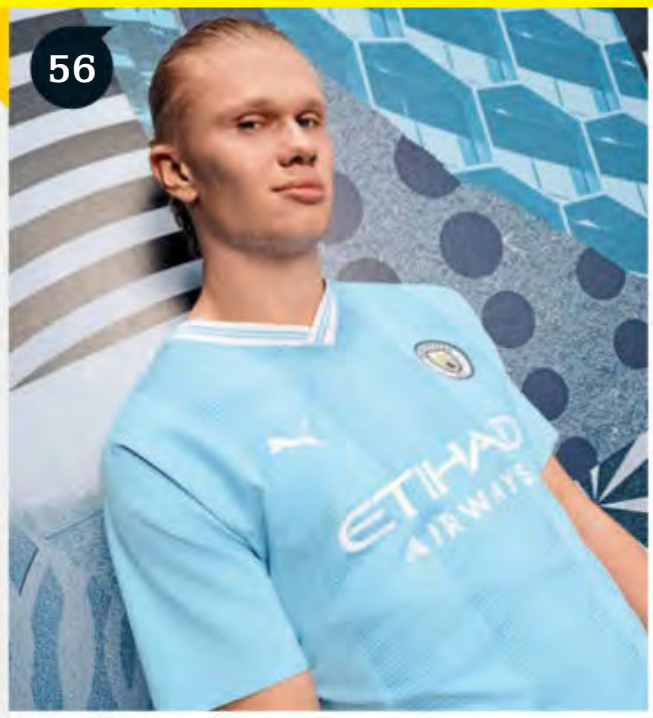
ON SALE SEPTEMBER 1

SEASON PREVIEW

2023-24



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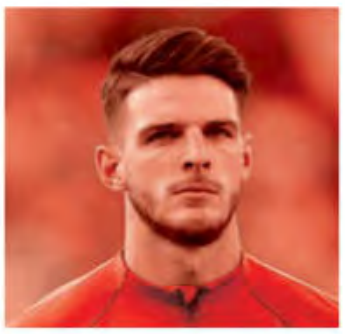
City chasing history

Pep Guardiola's team can achieve unprecedented success with another title – but face stiff competition throughout the league

PLAYERS TO WATCH

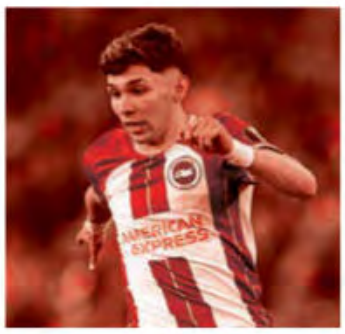


DECLAN RICE
(Arsenal)
Managed his British record £105m departure from West Ham United with good grace and minimum fuss. Can his admirable character and developing talent now anchor a first title for Arsenal in 20 years?

SANDRO TONALI
(Newcastle United)
Widely seen as the best young midfielder of his generation in Italy, and already a title winner with Milan. May take a little time to adjust to the pace of the Premier League but will undoubtedly strengthen the Magpies' midfield.

DOMINIK SZOBOSZLAI
(Liverpool)
The 22-year-old Hungary midfielder's all-action style and fierce shooting should be a big hit at Liverpool as they evolve in the midfield area. His extrovert rapport with supporters will also help the transition from German side RB Leipzig.

CHRISTOPHER NKUNKU
(Chelsea)
Another recruit from RB Leipzig, Nkunku looks to be a very smart signing for Chelsea. The attacker is brilliant playing between the lines, and lightning sharp on the break. His unflashy nature will endear him to the fans.



JULIO ENCISO
(Brighton & Hove Albion)
The teenage Paraguayan was a burst of brilliance for Brighton towards the end of the last campaign, scoring the Goal of the Season. Expect more of the same this year as Roberto De Zerbi looks to continue his excellent work.

Team to beat... Manchester City

Pep Guardiola has conquered so many frontiers in football that his place in the pantheon of all-time great coaches is far beyond dispute. This season, though, he will try to boldly go where no manager has gone before and capture the English league title for a fourth consecutive year.

Nobody has achieved this, not even Sir Alex Ferguson, Bob Paisley or the great Herbert Chapman of a century ago. In the long history of the game in England, a hat-trick of three successive championships has happened just five times previously: Huddersfield Town 1924-26, Arsenal 1933-35 (both inspired by Chapman), Liverpool 1982-84 (Paisley, then Joe Fagan), and Manchester United twice in 1999-2001 and 2007-09 under Ferguson.

Manchester City became the sixth club to win three titles in a row last year – guided by the genius of Guardiola – and now have a chance to forge a unique legend. If they can, this would be Pep's finest glory of all, surpassing even the exhilarating verve of his first Barcelona team. Of the five previous attempts to win four straight English titles, only United in 2010 came close, finishing one point behind Carlo Ancelotti's Chelsea.

Chasing history ...Pep Guardiola

> Famous last words, maybe, but there truly is the possibility of a more wide-open title race than for many a year

It will be a formidable challenge, not just because the weight of history deems it to be mission impossible, not just because City have lost their quietly influential captain Ilkay Gundogan after his move to Barcelona, and not just because Erling Haaland cannot possibly score so many goals again, can he? This season the Premier League title race also promises to be much more competitive than last year when a resurgent Arsenal were the only side to pose a threat to Guardiola's team.

There could and should be several powerful contenders in the coming campaign to pressurise City, whose most interesting move in the summer transfer market was the pursuit of highly-regarded Croatia centre-back Josko Gvardiol for a world record fee for a defender.

Arsenal will again be serious challengers, having strengthened significantly with the signings of England superstar Declan Rice and quicksilver talent Kai Havertz. Liverpool, so limp last year, are likely to be rejuvenated by the young legs and hard-running class of Alexis Mac Allister and Dominik Szoboszlai in midfield. Newcastle United's emerging power, fuelled by the intelligent coaching of Eddie Howe and the hard cash of their Saudi Arabian owners, is likely to grow ever more forceful.

KEVIN SCHADE
(Brentford)
A speedy winger who can also play as a striker, Schade could become a real force this season for Brentford – and very much needed in Ivan Toney's absence – after a £22m long-term move from Freiburg was settled in the summer.

JAMES TRAFFORD
(Burnley)
The best young English goalkeeper should get a golden opportunity, aged just 20, to develop his talent in the Premier League after a summer switch from Manchester City. His U21 Euros heroics certainly raised his profile.

MASON MOUNT
(Manchester United)
Many eyes will be on the England midfielder. Can he resurrect his form and fizz at Manchester United following a miserable season last time round at Chelsea? After being handed the No.7 shirt, United obviously expect big things.

TAIWO AWONIYI
(Nottingham Forest)
The big Nigerian target man finished last season with a blaze of goals to help Nottingham Forest survive the drop, and could be one of the stars of this campaign now that he is attuned to the Premier League.

LEVI COLWILL
(Chelsea)
Whoever he plays for this season, the highly-rated left-sided centre-back, who shone so impressively for England during their U21 Euros triumph this summer, should continue to prove that he'll be a star of the future.

Ready to go again... last season's runners-up Arsenal have tied the likes of Martinelli, Saka and Saliba to new long-term contracts

Chelsea could also be a major threat if Mauricio Pochettino can swiftly impose discipline on a squad full of talent. And we haven't even mentioned Manchester United yet, now more settled under the leadership of Erik ten Hag.

Famous last words, maybe, but there truly is the possibility of a more wide-open title race than for many a year.

Another factor that will make it difficult for Manchester City is the rising level of football played by the mid-ranking clubs in the Premier League, inspired ironically by the tactical revolution of Guardiola himself. Brighton and Brentford, for example, perform with rare panache and can beat any team on their day; the Bees were the only side to beat City home and away in the league last season. This season Burnley and Bournemouth will also both start with Guardiola disciples as their managers, Vincent Kompany and Andoni Iraola respectively.

> Arsenal will again be serious challengers, having strengthened significantly with the signings of Declan Rice and Kai Havertz

Remember, too, that Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta was once an assistant to Guardiola at City, while Ten Hag was the head coach of Bayern Munich's reserve team during the Pep years there. Never has one single manager had such a profound influence on the direction of English football.

The astonishing strength in depth of the Premier League is evident, too, in the excellence of other traditional clubs. West Ham United won the Europa Conference League last season despite struggling domestically, and should be improved on the home front this time. Aston Villa have blossomed under the astute leadership of Unai Emery, and are likely to thrive again. And then come Tottenham, who play in the most magnificent Premier League stadium of all, and now have the relatively unknown but widely admired Australian manager Ange Postecoglou in charge. Writing off Spurs would be folly.

It will be fiendishly tough, in consequence, for the newly-promoted clubs to survive more than one season, particularly Luton and Sheffield United, while there could be uneasy campaigns for Everton, Crystal Palace and Wolves.

The relentless focus, however, will be on Guardiola's chance to make history in the most demanding modern football environment. This is not Germany or France, where the champions are almost assured before the start. This is not Spain, dominated by two clubs. This is not Italy where there are a few contenders but precious little depth.

Manchester City's recent success is incredible, and achieved with spellbindingly attractive football. Yes, they have spent hugely, but so have their rivals. It is Guardiola's tactical genius and the improvement of individual players like John Stones with his coaching that makes the difference. There is another statistic, too, which highlights the point. City have won five of the last six Premier League titles, finishing second in the other season. That has been achieved only once before, by Manchester United under the guidance of Sir Alex Ferguson (between 1996 and 2001).

No team in England has ever won six titles in seven seasons. It would be another happy slice of history for the irrepressible Pep Guardiola.

Jim Holden

New arrival... Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou

PROMOTED TEAMS

EFL champions...Burnley

BURNLEY
The club that thrived for several years in the Premier League under the pragmatic management of Sean Dyche is now back playing a very different, progressive style of football under Vincent Kompany. Can the Clarets thrive, or will it just be a battle to survive?

SHEFFIELD UNITED
When the Blades were last promoted to the Premier League in 2019, they finished ninth in their first season using innovative tactics which allowed freedom for their centre-backs to sweep forward. Current boss Paul Heckingbottom, in place since 2021, revived that style to win promotion, and they should be fascinating to watch.

LUTON TOWN
What a story, the first club in English football history to return to the top flight after plummeting down to non-league status. So much has changed since 1992, but not Luton's tiny Kenilworth Road stadium, which will be a culture shock for the giants.

Team by team

ENGLAND

ARSENAL
Manager: Mikel Arteta
Key Arrivals: Rice (West Ham), Havertz (Chelsea), Timber (Ajax)
Key Departures: Xhaka (Leverkusen), Mari (Monza), Maitland-Niles (released)
Prediction: High-class signings in Declan Rice, Jurrien Timber and Kai Havertz should make the Gunners strong title contenders again and also a force in their long-awaited return to the Champions League. However, the big spending will inevitably lead to higher expectations and more pressure.

ASTON VILLA
Manager: Unai Emery
Key Arrivals: Tielemans (Leicester), Torres (Villarreal)
Key Departures: Young (Everton), Nakamba (Luton)
Prediction: The exciting rejuvenation forged by Emery last season will raise expectations that may be hard to fulfil, although the additions of Pau Torres and Youri Tielemans have strengthened their squad considerably. The Villans' aim will be back-to-back European qualification and to have a deep run in the UEFA Europa Conference League – Emery has a terrific record in Europe.

BOURNEMOUTH
Manager: Andoni Iraola
Key Arrivals: Kluivert (Roma), Traore (Sassuolo), Faivre (Lyon), Kerkez (AZ)
Key Departures: Lerma (Crystal Palace), Faivre (Lorient), Pearson (Stoke), Stanislas (released), Stacey (Norwich), Dembele (Birmingham)
Prediction: The club has taken a big gamble in replacing Gary O'Neil – who did a fantastic job last season keeping the Cherries up – with Iraola to try to emulate the stylish success of Brighton.

BRENTFORD
Manager: Thomas Frank
Key Arrivals: Flekken (Freiburg), Schade (Freiburg), Collins (Wolves), Kim Ji-soo (Seongnam)
Key Departures: Jansson (Malmo), Ghoddos (released), Fosu (released), Dervisoglu (Galatasaray), Bidstrup (Red Bull Salzburg)
Prediction: The club has worked a miracle for the past couple of seasons on a shoestring budget but, without the suspended Ivan Toney, could they get sucked into a relegation dogfight?

BRIGHTON & HOVE ALBION
Manager: Roberto De Zerbi
Key Arrivals: Milner (Liverpool), Joao Pedro (Watford), Dahoud (Dortmund), Verbruggen (Anderlecht)
Key Departures: Kozlowski (Vitesse), Mac Allister (Liverpool), Scherpen (Sturm Graz), Sima (Rangers)
Prediction: De Zerbi's side will remain one of the most entertaining and vibrant teams in the Premier League, although resources could be stretched by a first-ever season in the Europa League.

BURNLEY
Manager: Vincent Kompany
Key Arrivals: Amdouni (Basel), O'Shea (West Brom), Vigouroux (Leyton Orient), Beyer (M'gladbach), Trafford (Man City), Redmond (Besiktas)
Key Departures: Barnes (Norwich)
Prediction: The Clarets should be entertaining to watch and probably just strong enough to avoid a yo-yo relegation back to the Championship. It will be interesting to see how they adapt their new style of play to the top flight.

CHELSEA
Manager: Mauricio Pochettino
Key Arrivals: Nkunku (RB Leizpig), Jackson (Villarreal), Gabriel (Santos)
Key Departures: Havertz (Arsenal), Loftus-Cheek (Milan), Azpilicueta (Atletico Madrid), Kante (Al Ittihad), Mount (Man Utd), D. Fofana (Union Berlin), Kovacic (Man City), Mendy (Al Ahli), Koulibaly (Al Hilal), Pulisic (Milan), Rahman (PAOK), Ampadu (Leeds), Aubameyang (Marseille), Bakayoko (released)
Prediction: After a vast change of personnel in the summer it will be a major triumph if the new manager can conjure a top-four finish, although expectations will be high after another summer of spending and with Poch's track record in the Premier League.

CRYSTAL PALACE
Manager: Roy Hodgson
Key Arrivals: Lerma (Bournemouth)
Key Departures: Milivojevic (released), McArthur (released), Butland (Rangers)
Prediction: The Eagles will need all of Hodgson's immense experience to avoid a season haunted by the spectre of relegation. The 75-year-old manager improved the team immeasurably when re-taking charge last March.

EVERTON
Manager: Sean Dyche
Key Arrivals: Young (Aston Villa)
Key Departures: Davies (released), Mina (released), Townsend (released), Begovic (QPR), Simms (Coventry), Kean (Juventus), Nkounkou (Saint-Etienne)
Prediction: Another season of trouble and strife seems likely on and off the field. Dyche did well to churn out wins last season to help the Toffees avoid the drop, but the verdict is still out.

FULHAM
Manager: Marco Silva
Key Arrivals: None
Key Departures: Sessegnon (released), Bryan (Millwall), Duffy (Norwich), Gazzaniga (Girona)
Prediction: Over-achieved last season, but may under-achieve this time round while still narrowly avoiding relegation. Persuading Willian to sign a new deal gave the club a boost, but uncertainty over the future of top scorer Aleksandar Mitrovic and manager Silva following reported approaches from Saudi Arabia could prove unsettling.

LIVERPOOL
Manager: Jurgen Klopp
Key Arrivals: Szoboszlai (RB Leipzig), Mac Allister (Brighton)
Key Departures: Milner (Brighton), Firmino (Al Ahli), Oxlade-Chamberlain (released), Keita (Werder Bremen), Carvalho (RB Leipzig), Ramsay (Preston), Van den Berg (Mainz)
Prediction: It will be fascinating to see how the Reds' midfield rebuild develops. The additions of Alexis Mac Allister and Dominik Szoboszlai represent sound business, and likely a return to Champions League football.

LUTON
Manager: Rob Edwards
Key Arrivals: Andersen (Barnsley), Chong (Birmingham), Nakamba (Aston Villa), Ogbene (Rotherham)
Key Departures: Lansbury (released), Bradley (Derby)
Prediction: The fairy tale has been fabulous, and they should enjoy the drama of the Premier League before an almost inevitable relegation.

MANCHESTER CITY
Manager: Pep Guardiola
Key Arrivals: Kovacic (Chelsea)
Key Departures: Mendy (Lorient), Gundogan (Barcelona), Herrera (Girona), Delap (Hull), Charles (Southampton), Trafford (Burnley)
Prediction: They are the title favourites, as ever, and it will be the toughest challenge of Guardiola's career to win a fourth consecutive Premier League, but few would bet against him achieveing it.

MANCHESTER UNITED
Manager: Erik ten Hag
Key Arrivals: Mount (Chelsea), Onana (Inter)
Key Departures: Jones (released), Tuanzebe (released), De Gea (released), Iqbal (Utrecht)
Prediction: A mixed first season for Ten Hag could be followed by more of the same. Likely to end up just outside the top four this time. Spending £100m combined on Mount and Onana shows the manager's intentions, but signing star player Marcus Rashford up to a new long-term contract could be United's best piece of summer business.

NEWCASTLE UNITED
Manager: Eddie Howe
Key Arrivals: Tonali (Milan), Minteh (Odense)
Key Departures: Wood (Nott'm Forest), M. Longstaff (released), Minteh (Feyenoord)
Prediction: It should be another exhilarating season at St James' Park. A strong Champions League campaign, however, could put a top-four finish at risk and will test the squad depth, which will likely be bolstered before deadline day with Harvey Barnes (incoming) and Allan Saint-Maximin (outgoing) both reportedly close to completion at the time of writing.

NOTTINGHAM FOREST
Manager: Steve Cooper
Key Arrivals: Wood (Newcastle)
Key Departures: Lingard (released), Ayew (released), Colback (released), Cafu (Rotherham), Taylor (released)
Prediction: A wild first season back in the Premier League could be followed by a stronger showing this time round now that their large squad has settled. Mid-table solidity may await.

SHEFFIELD UNITED
Manager: Paul Heckingbottom
Key Arrivals: Slimane (Brondby), Larouci (Troyes), Traore (BK Hacken)
Key Departures: Sharp (released), O'Connell (released), Stevens (Stoke), Gordon (released)
Prediction: The formidable strength of so many clubs in the middle section of the Premier League means relegation appears likely for the Blades.

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR
Manager: Ange Postecoglou
Key Arrivals: Maddison (Leicester), Vicario (Empoli), Porro (Sporting), Kulusevski (Juventus), Solomon (Shakhtar Donestk)
Key Departures: Lucas Moura (released), Winks (Leicester)
Prediction: The Tottenham squad will be getting used to another style of football under Postecoglou and even the Australian has suggested it might take some time to implement. A slow start could see them playing catch up for the rest of the campaign and then it will be a race for the European spots.

WEST HAM UNITED
Manager: David Moyes
Key Arrivals: None
Key Departures: Rice (Arsenal), Lanzini (released), Masuaku (Besiktas)
Prediction: The glory of capturing a European trophy should calm the nerves of last campaign and bring mid-table solidity, despite the major loss of midfield lynchpin Declan Rice. His replacement faces a huge task.

WOLVES
Manager: Julen Lopetegui
Key Arrivals: Traore (Metz), Doherty (Atletico Madrid)
Key Departures: Neves (Al Hilal), Costa (released), Coady (Leicester), Collins (Brentford), Moutinho (released)
Prediction: Likely to be a wholly underwhelming campaign, but mastermind Lopetegui should help avoid the nightmare of relegation.

Changes afoot

Ahead of the new campaign, Spain's biggest clubs are all facing changes – both on and off the pitch

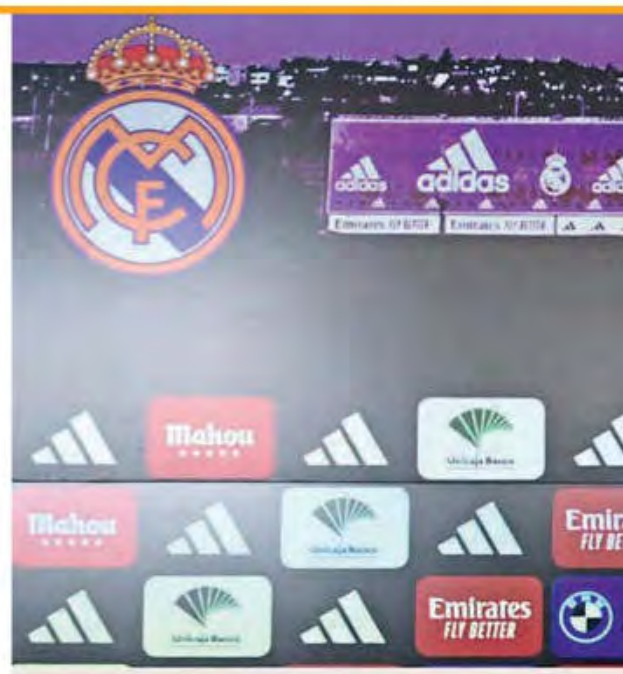
Old face...Joselu returns to Real Madrid after 11 years away

When the new season starts in Spain, a number of very familiar faces will be missing. *Clasico* legends Karim Benzema (Al Ittihad) and Sergio Busquets (Inter Miami) have left the continent; Real Betis legend Joaquin, the league's joint all-time record appearance-maker – and record joke-maker – has retired, and even much-maligned referee Antonio Mateu Lahoz has packed it in after 15 years and 288 matches. Spanish football won't be the same without them but, such is the merry-go-round nature of the sport, there are already a number of new faces ready to take their places in the spotlight.

Chief among them is Jude Bellingham, the latest member of the Real Madrid "midfield massive". He joins veteran pair Toni Kroos and Luka Modric, who have both signed one-year contract extensions, France duo Aurelien Tchouameni and Eduardo Camavinga, and Dani Ceballos and Federico Valverde in what was already a better selection pool than most managers could dream of possessing.

The former Borussia Dortmund fans' favourite will become the sixth Englishman to play for the Spanish giants after Laurie Cunningham, Steve McManaman, David Beckham, Michael Owen and Jonathan Woodgate. The latter's infamous spell, which resulted in him being voted the club's worst signing of the 21st century, clearly wasn't enough to put *Los Blancos* off signing English players indefinitely.

Normally it would be fair to grant a 20-year-old, arriving from a foreign league at one of the biggest clubs on the planet, time to adjust to his new surroundings. But Bellingham is not normal; he's an established England international with over 20 Champions League appearances to his name and, as such, will expect to start most matches.



> Normally it would be fair to grant a 20-year-old, arriving from a foreign league at one of the biggest clubs on the planet, time to adjust to his new surroundings. But Bellingham is not normal

PLAYERS TO WATCH

FRAN GARCIA
(Real Madrid)
After three seasons of development at Rayo Vallecano the Real Madrid youth product, who turns 24 in August, returns to his old club with the task of attempting to fix *Los Blancos'* issues at left-back.

HAMARI TRAORE
(Real Sociedad)
One of the few weak links in Real Sociedad's side last season was at right-back, an issue they've looked to resolve by signing 31-year-old Traore from Rennes. With almost 50 caps for Mali, he'll add experience to *La Real's* back line.

AIMAR OROZ
(Osasuna)
In his first season as a first-team regular, the 21-year-old attacking midfielder scored three goals and created six in Osasuna's impressive seventh-placed finish. He'll be targetting double figures this time around.

ALEJANDRO BALDE
(Barcelona)
With Jordi Alba having departed, the left-back berth at Barcelona now well and truly belongs to Balde. The exciting full-back is an incredible talent who went from strength to strength in the 2022-23 campaign.

ANTOINE GRIEZMANN
(Atletico Madrid)
Despite interest in Saudi Arabia and from PSG, the France forward has decided to stay at Atletico and will hope to continue his remarkable form from last season ahead of next summer's European Championship.

New face...Jude Bellingham is the most eye-catching arrival in Spain this summer

Another "new" player at the Bernabeu with an actual gap to fill, despite insisting that he isn't Benzema's replacement, is Joselu. The 33-year-old journeyman striker scored 40 goals in 73 games for Real Madrid B between 2009 and 2012 – and two in two for the senior side – before embarking on a tour of Europe that took in stopovers at Hoffenheim, Eintracht Frankfurt, Hannover, Stoke City and Newcastle United.

He joins Carlo Ancelotti's squad from relegated Espanyol, where he averaged a goal every other game last season, on loan with an option to buy. His La Liga goal record since returning to Spain in 2019 is respectable, yet he does not have the big-name profile that the club's fans crave. Assuming that he will not be expected to fill Benzema's goalscoring shoes, he will either be a stopgap until a more celebrated forward arrives, or Brazilian winger Vinicius Jr. will become the team's attacking focal point.

Meanwhile, across enemy lines, Barcelona boasted the key arrival of Manchester City captain Ilkay Gundogan on a free transfer. In a year in which they've lost three of their leadership team since the start of 2022-23

Barcelona new boy...Ilkay Gundogan

RODRI
(Real Betis)
The ex-Real Madrid and Barcelona youth product is becoming an important player for Real Betis, and shone for Spain at the Under-21 Euros as an attacking midfielder, later making the official Team of the Tournament.

ALEX BAENA
(Villarreal)
The 22-year-old was promoted to Villarreal's senior squad alongside Nicolas Jackson last term and both impressed in 2022-23. The Spanish winger scored six goals and provided two assists in his first full campaign.

NICO WILLIAMS
(Athletic Club)
Despite reported interest from Premier League clubs Aston Villa and Tottenham, the young winger signed a new contract with Athletic. Another productive season could see those links return in 2024.

VINICIUS JUNIOR
(Real Madrid)
The electrifying Brazil superstar has recorded double figures for goals in back-to-back league campaigns, and his output will be even more vital in Karim Benzema's absence. Now bestowed with the club's iconic No.7 shirt.

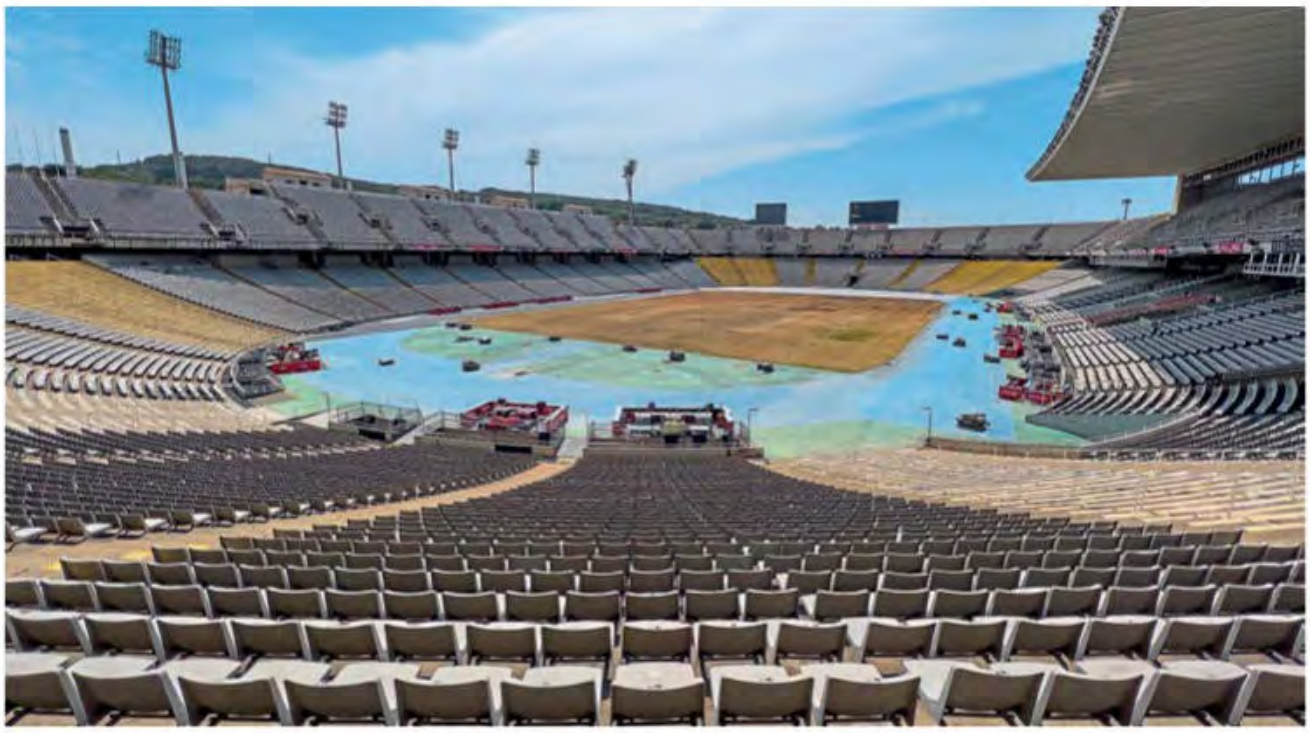
ARNAU MARTINEZ
(Girona)
The youngest scorer in Girona's history is actually a defender, albeit an attacking one. The 20-year-old right-back had a splendid 2022-23 campaign, scoring three times and registering four assists.

(Busquets, Gerard Pique and Jordi Alba), the 32-year-old will shoulder a fair chunk of responsibility this season. The Germany international wasn't just signed for his captaincy capabilities, though: he can play as a deep-lying midfielder or further forward, and comes from the same school of thought of how football should be played.

If, as expected, Xavi persists with four midfielders, Gundogan's arrival takes some of the creative pressure off Pedri's young shoulders, and would soften the blow if the uber-talented Spain international were to suffer another long-term injury.

After the Catalan club finished ten points clear of their rivals last season, who themselves ended just one point ahead of Atletico Madrid, many are expecting the 2023-24 campaign to produce a much tighter title race; if only for the fact that Real Madrid surely can't be quite as lacklustre.

One potential curveball for the reigning champions is that they will be playing home matches in the city's Olympic Stadium while renovations continue on the Camp Nou. The Estadi Olimpic Lluis Companys was built, in its current form, for the 1992 Games, but has not seen regular football since Espanyol vacated it in 2009.



Temporary home... Barcelona will play at the Lluis Companys Olympic Stadium

"My feeling is it won't be easy in Montjuic," said Xavi on the temporary transition to a new home. "We will need the fans with us."

Still, the 54,367-capacity stadium should provide more glamour and comfort than the makeshift 6,000-capacity Alfredo di Stefano Stadium, where Real Madrid played in the 2020-21 season while the Bernabeu was being renovated. The final stage of work will be completed by the end of the year, with a glitzy unveiling featuring many of the club's legendary figures planned for December.

> Many expect the 2023-24 campaign to produce a much tighter title race; if only for the fact that Real Madrid surely can't be quite as lacklustre

After finishing third for the seventh time in 11 seasons, Atletico Madrid will be looking to maintain that position at the very least. At one stage, there was a genuine possibility that 2022-23 would be Diego Simeone's final campaign in Spain, but he'll see out the final year of his contract, at least. Last season, when Atleti rarely looked like title competitors and exited the Champions League at the group stage, was certainly not the way in which the Argentine would want to leave. If this is to be his final season then he'll want to go out with a bang.

Title defence... Barca boss Xavi

One coach in the early days of his tenure is Sevilla's Jose Luis Mendilibar, although plenty has happened since he took over in March – not least lifting the Europa League trophy in May. After recording their worst league finish since they were relegated from La Liga in the 1999-2000 season, *Los Nervionenses* will be hoping their resurgence under Mendilibar continues.

For the previous three seasons, Sevilla were very much established as La Liga's fourth team, but that spot went to Real Sociedad in 2022-23. Balancing the demands of the league with a first-ever appearance in the Champions League will present an enormous challenge for Imanol Alguacil, one of last season's standout coaches.

Meanwhile, Celta Vigo responded to narrowly avoiding the drop by appointing Rafael Benitez as their new manager. The former Everton boss returns to La Liga for the first time since he was sacked by Real Madrid in 2016.

Jared Tinslay

Final season?... Atletico coach Diego Simeone

PROMOTED CLUBS

GRANADA
The Andalusians made an instant return to La Liga as champions thanks to the attacking brilliance of Segunda Division's top goalscorer, 28-year-old Albania forward Myrto Uzuni, and the league's top assist maker, former Real Madrid and Napoli winger Jose Callejon.

LAS PALMAS
Las Palmas needed a draw with Alaves on the final game of the 2022-23 season to guarantee promotion and did so to finish second due to their superior goal difference. It ends a five-year spell in Segunda and makes up for their play-off disappointment of the previous year.

ALAVES
Alaves secured the final spot in La Liga after a dramatic play-off final win over Levante, culminating in a 129th-minute penalty from Asier Villalibre. In the process, Luis Garcia became just the third manager to seal La Liga promotion with three different clubs in the 21st century.

Dramatic winner ...Asier Villalibre

Team by team

SPAIN

ALAVES
Manager: Luis Garcia
Key Arrivals: Maras (Almeria), Guevara (Real Sociedad)
Key Departures: Laguardia (retired)
Prediction: Alaves' biggest downfall in the 2021-22 season, when they were relegated from La Liga, was their lack of goals. Their highest goalscorer in the second tier last term was Luis Rioja with ten, so it might well be another case of them not scoring enough to remain in Spain's top tier.

ALMERIA
Manager: Vicente Moreno
Key Arrivals: Suarez (Marseille), Gonzalez (Real Betis)
Key Departures: Maras (Alaves)
Prediction: Almeria survived on the final day of 2022-23, with coach Rubi leaving at the end of his contract. Incoming Moreno's last spell in Spain was a successful one at Espanyol, before he was lured to Saudi Arabia. He should make them more competitive.

ATHLETIC CLUB
Manager: Ernesto Valverde
Key Arrivals: Ruiz de Galarreta (Mallorca)
Key Departures: Martinez (Barcelona), Zarraga (released), Iru (Logrones)
Prediction: One win in their last eight games was clearly a disappointing end to 2022-23, but they will make their Europa Conference League debut due to Osasuna's suspension, pending an appeal. Inigo Martinez's departure was an expected blow, but another upper-mid table finish is predicted.

ATLETICO MADRID
Manager: Diego Simeone
Key Arrivals: Soyuncu (Leicester), Galan (Celta Vigo), Azpilicueta (Chelsea)
Key Departures: Kondogbia (Marseille), Sanchez (Celta Vigo), Doherty (Wolves), Lodi (Marseille)
Prediction: Atleti really benefitted from the scintillating form of Antoine Griezmann and the returning Alvaro Morata's goals. They're unlikely to be in a title battle but third place and a good cup run seems likely for what could be Simeone's closing curtain.

BARCELONA
Manager: Xavi
Key Arrivals: Gundogan (Man City), Martinez (Athletic Club), Romeu (Girona), Vitor Roque (Athletico Paranaense – *joining in 2024*)
Key Departures: Alba (Inter Miami), Busquets (Inter Miami), Akhomach (Villarreal), Umtiti (released)
Prediction: Barca's form noticeably dipped once the title had already been wrapped up, and they will need to be reinvigorated when the new season comes around. Demands are high: Xavi will be expected to defend the title and improve significantly in Europe.

CADIZ
Manager: Sergio
Key Arrivals: Machis (Real Valladolid), Escalante (Lazio)
Key Departures: Bongonda (Spartak Moscow), Lozano (Getafe), Espino (Rayo Vallecano), Arzamendia (Cerro Porteno)
Prediction: Don't be fooled by Cadiz's 14th-placed finish last season; they were one of the six teams in real danger of being relegated on the final gameweek. They're a side that seriously lacks goals and might not be so lucky in avoiding the drop in 2023-24.

CELTA VIGO
Manager: Rafael Benitez
Key Arrivals: Sanchez (Atletico Madrid), Bamba (Lille)
Key Departures: Suarez (Villarreal), Galan (Atletico Madrid), Fernandez (Pumas UNAM), Pineda (AEK Athens)
Prediction: Benitez failed to last a full season in his last job at Everton and had been out of management for 18 months before agreeing to take over the Celta position. A freshness is certainly needed at the club, who narrowly escaped relegation and have one of the oldest squads in the league.

GETAFE
Manager: Jose Bordalas
Key Arrivals: Alderete (Hertha), Portu (Real Sociedad), Lozano (Cadiz)
Key Departures: Jankto (Cagliari), Munir (released), Casilla (released)
Prediction: Turkey forward Enes Unal has scored 30 goals over the past two seasons, but they haven't been enough to make things comfortable for Getafe. This season should, though, be slightly less stressful than last, when their fate came down to the final gameweek.

GIRONA
Manager: Michel
Key Arrivals: Gazzaniga (Fulham), Torre (Barcelona), Blind (Bayern), Herrera (Man City), Savio (Troyes)
Key Departures: Romeu (Barcelona), Terrats (Villarreal)
Prediction: Girona finished in the upper half of the table last season due to their favourable head-to-head records against Rayo Vallecano and Sevilla. They were great fun to watch, scoring lots and conceding in equal parts. The goals need to keep flowing or some nerves could creep in.

GRANADA
Manager: Paco Lopez
Key Arrivals: Vallejo (Real Madrid)
Key Departures: Quini (Olympiakos)
Prediction: Last season's top scorer Myrto Uzuni has another crack at the top tier after scoring just once in 15 La Liga appearances in 2021-22. The summer sale of the club meant there has been some uncertainty over their direction, which supporters will be hoping doesn't translate onto the pitch.

LAS PALMAS
Manager: Garcia Pimienta
Key Arrivals: Herrera (Ibiza), Munoz (Eibar), Sinkgraven (Leverkusen)
Key Departures: None
Prediction: The Canaries' most successful club return to La Liga after an impressive 2022-23 in which they were one of the most consistent performers. They boasted Segunda's tightest defence and will need to build on that to stay in the top tier.

MALLORCA
Manager: Javier Aguirre
Key Arrivals: Mascarell (Elche), Lato (Valencia), Van der Heyden (Union SG)
Key Departures: Ruiz de Galarreta (Athletic Club), Lee Kang-in (PSG), Mboula (Verona)
Prediction: Javier Aguirre has worked wonders at Mallorca since taking over, taking them to ninth place last season. There won't be any lofty ambitions of qualifying for Europe though, he'll once again set his side the target of staying up.

OSASUNA
Manager: Jagoba Arrasate
Key Arrivals: Arnaiz (Leganes)
Key Departures: Moreno (Mirandes), Hernandez (Rayo Vallecano)
Prediction: Arrasate is another coach doing a remarkable job, taking Osasuna to the Copa del Rey final and European qualification. Sadly for them, they have been banned from the UEFA Conference League – pending an appeal – for a decade-old match-fixing scandal. How they react may well define their season.

RAYO VALLECANO
Manager: Francisco
Key Arrivals: Hernandez (Osasuna), Espino (Cadiz)
Key Departures: Garcia (Real Madrid)
Prediction: After flirting with European football last season under highly-rated coach Andoni Iraola, Rayo are expected to have a much tougher 2023-24. New boss Francisco arrives with a point to prove after a tough end to his last spell in La Liga with Elche.

REAL BETIS
Manager: Manuel Pellegrini
Key Arrivals: Perez (Leicester), Roca (Leeds), Bellerin (Sporting)
Key Departures: Martin (FC Andorra), Gonzalez (Almeria), Loren (Aris Saloniki)
Prediction: Coach Pellegrini achieved a third consecutive season of European football for Betis and helped his side finish above arch-rivals Sevilla for the first time since 2017-18. They will be aiming to challenge for the Champions League spots this time around.

REAL MADRID
Manager: Carlo Ancelotti
Key Arrivals: Bellingham (Dortmund), Garcia (Rayo Vallecano), Joselu (Espanyol), Guler (Fenerbahce)
Key Departures: Benzema (Al Ittihad), Hazard (released), Asensio (PSG), Vallejo (Granada), Mariano (released)
Prediction: Expect a reaction from a side still hurting from last season's disappointing campaign. Even without Karim Benzema, they will be the biggest contender for Barca's crown, although the impact of his departure will only become clearer with time.

REAL SOCIEDAD
Manager: Imanon Alguacil
Key Arrivals: Traore (Rennes)
Key Departures: Lopez (Tenerife), Guevara (Alaves), Portu (Getafe)
Prediction: Alguacil's stylish side deserve their spot in the Champions League this season and could surprise punters who didn't see them play last term. Despite qualifying for Europe's elite competition, they would likely be happy with another top-six finish.

SEVILLA
Manager: Jose Luis Mendilibar
Key Arrivals: Bade (Rennes), Pedrosa (Espanyol), Gattoni (San Lorenzo)
Key Departures: None
Prediction: The miracle of Mendilibar is going to live long in the memory of *Sevillistas* but now it is time to build on his side's European success and strong end to the domestic campaign. Despite finishing as low as 12th last season, European football must be the aim for the Europa League champions.

VALENCIA
Manager: Ruben Baraja
Key Arrivals: Pepelu (Levante), Ozkacar (Lyon)
Key Departures: Lato (Mallorca), Saenz (Leganes)
Prediction: Things are looking pretty bleak for Valencia ahead of the new campaign, not least because last season's top scorers Justin Kluivert and Samuel Lino are no longer at the club. Yet again, there is real danger that they could be relegated.

VILLARREAL
Manager: Quique Setien
Key Arrivals: Suarez (Celta Vigo), Terrats (Girona), Brereton Diaz (Blackburn), Akhomach (Barcelona)
Key Departures: Jackson (Chelsea), Torres (Aston Villa), Dia (Salernitana), Iborra (Olympiakos)
Prediction: The loss of top scorer Nicolas Jackson and Pau Torres, who accumulated more league minutes than any team-mate barring Dani Parejo last season, is a big setback, but Chile's Ben Brereton Diaz has 36 league goals across the past two campaigns. Another top-six finish is attainable.

Cheaper by the dozen

Bayern Munich eye a 12th consecutive title as Bundesliga standards slip

PLAYERS TO WATCH

MARIUS BULTER
(Hoffenheim)
The 30-year-old goalscoring left-winger was arguably the only positive as Schalke dropped out of the Bundesliga last season. Just five years ago he was playing in the Regionalliga.

RAPHAEL GUERREIRO
(Bayern Munich)
Overflowing with finesse and attacking intent, the Portuguese international left-back or number eight was absolutely outstanding for Dortmund in the second half of last season. A free transfer steal for Bayern from their big rivals.

LEE JAE-SUNG
(Mainz)
The phenomenally talented South Korean attacking midfielder can blow hot and cold but, when the 30-year-old does turn on the creative style, he is a work of art. Got into double figures for goals and assists combined last season.

DONYELL MALEN
(Borussia Dortmund)
Over the course of his two seasons with the *Schwarz-Gelben*, the Dutch winger, formerly of PSV and the Arsenal youth academy, has gone from widely-decried flop to high flyer. A key figure in BVB's New Year revival.

ENZO MILLOT
(Stuttgart)
Once labelled undisciplined, the young French midfielder suddenly began to blossom when Sebastian Hoeness took over as Stuttgart coach last spring. Much to the fore in his club's Bundesliga survival push, there is much more to come.

Title favourites ...Bayern begin another season ahead of their title rivals

Here's a chilling thought for any team hoping to dislodge Bayern Munich from their long-held number one perch: even when severely under-par last season, accumulating mistakes both on and off the pitch, the Bavarians still had enough to be champions again, albeit only on goal-difference from Borussia Dortmund.

Suitably chastened and not a little embarrassed to have let their standards drop, Bayern are most unlikely to make the same mistakes again: the complacency which crept in; the ego trips of certain players; the boardroom panic – notably the decision to sack coach Julian Nagelsmann in late March and replace him with Thomas Tuchel – and the poor transfer market dealings.

Everything points to Bayern bouncing back with renewed authority and purpose. Tuchel, as meticulous and driven as always, will have a full pre-season to bed down his principles and weed out those who don't follow the party line. After retiring as CEO in 2021, Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has returned to the board with the brief of bringing his extensive recruitment nous to bear. And perhaps most important of all, Bayern finally have realised what a colossal error it was to let star striker Robert Lewandowski leave the club without securing a proper replacement.

> Everything points to Bayern bouncing back with renewed authority and purpose

At the time of writing, the new big-fish front man has yet to be unveiled. But whether it is Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Kane, Eintracht Frankfurt's Randal Kolo Muani or Napoli goal-getter Victor Osimhen, Bayern undoubtedly will reap the rewards. For a club of their prestige and ambition, a natural goalscorer is a must. As willing as he was, Cameroon international Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting was not the solution.

Title winner... Thomas Tuchel

Goalkeeper and skipper Manuel Neuer should soon be back between the sticks after breaking a thigh bone in a skiing accident last December, while the new faces include versatile Portugal wing-back Raphael Guerreiro – who was out of contract at Dortmund – Austrian holding midfielder Konrad Laimer from RB Leipzig, and South Korea stopper Kim Min-jae, who made such a huge contribution to Napoli's Serie A title last term.

Bayern's two closest rivals, Dortmund and RB Leipzig, seem to be considerably weaker. Jude Bellingham, once the heart

FREDERIK RONNOW
(Union Berlin)
Union's dependable Danish goalkeeper is neither flashy nor spectacular but more than compensates in other areas, particularly his temperament, composure, solidity and comfort on the ball. A man for important stops at key times.

NICOLAS SEIWALD
(RB Leipzig)
Austria's Player of the Season for 2022-23, the dynamic and combative defensive midfielder swapped Red Bull Salzburg for RB Leipzig this summer and should easily adjust to the higher tempo in the Bundesliga.

ELLYES SKHIRI
(Eintracht Frankfurt)
Eintracht's director of sport Markus Krosche, who recently brought in the Tunisian deep-lying strategist on a Bosman free, rightly described the ex-Montpellier and Cologne man as "an absolute dream player".

PATRICK WIMMER
(Wolfsburg)
Much-improved Austrian winger or second striker, who can cause all manner of problems to markers with his unrelenting energy, enthusiasm and directness. Often unpredictable and unconventional, he's now a regular for his country.

FLORIAN WIRTZ
(Bayer Leverkusen)
After a long spell on the sidelines with a cruciate ligament injury, the outstanding playmaker, still only 20, is now fully fit again. His vision and flair for a through ball gives the *Werkself* another dimension.

Bellingham replacement... Felix Nmecha has joined Dortmund

and soul of the Dortmund midfield, is now adjusting to life at Real Madrid and the worry is that the *Schwarz-Gelben* will only partially fill the void.

Dortmund will be hoping that the €30 million acquisition of Wolfsburg's German Under-21 international Felix Nmecha will ease them through the post-Bellingham period. And they certainly have not signed a lightweight in the Hamburg-born ex-Manchester City apprentice: quick, technical, physically strong and impressive in all phases of the game.

> Dortmund will be hoping that the €30 million acquisition of Wolfsburg's German Under-21 international Felix Nmecha will ease them through the post-Bellingham period

RB Leipzig, Champions League qualifiers in each of the last five years, have a big rebuilding job too, forced to rethink after three of their best players – Laimer, forward Christopher Nkunku and playmaker Dominik Szoboszlai – left for Bayern, Chelsea and Liverpool respectively. France attacker Nkunku, the joint-leading scorer in the Bundesliga last season, will be particularly missed. True to form, RB went the U23 route in the replacement march, firstly spending €24m each on Slovenia striker Benjamin Sesko from sister club Red Bull Salzburg and Hoffenheim's Austrian number ten Christoph Baumgartner, before smashing their transfer record on Lens striker Lois Openda for €38m plus add-ons. Along with the later additions, both from PSG, of El Chadaille Bitshiabu and Xavi Simons, the RB renovation is well underway.

"I can understand the disappointment and the concern of our fans," admitted RB director of sport Max Eberl. "No club, no management group and no coach in the world would be happy to lose players of this stature. But it's not as though we were unprepared for all this. I can promise that we will once again have a classy and exciting side."

Two clubs opted for a change of technical area leadership in the off-season. After sacking Daniel Farke, Borussia Monchengladbach plumped for the former Young Boys and Bayer Leverkusen boss Gerardo Seoane, while Dino Toppmoller has taken over from Oliver Glasner at Eintracht Frankfurt. Toppmoller, once an assistant to Julian Nagelsmann at RB Leipzig and Bayern, is a chip off the old block: his father Klaus was a fine coach in his own right, notably leading Leverkusen to the Champions League final against Real Madrid at Hampden Park in 2002.

The new Bundesliga season comes at a time of considerable self-doubt in the German game. The *Nationalmannschaft* is currently a pale shadow of its once all-powerful self; the Under-21s crashed out of the recent European Championship in the first round, finishing rock bottom of their group; and in last season's Champions League campaign, no German team went further than the quarter-finals. Many argue that Bundesliga academies have taken their eye off the ball, that they are not producing enough youngsters of quality.

Somehow, some way, the Deutschland top flight has to launch a fightback. Right here, right now.

Nick Bidwell

PROMOTED TEAMS

New boys... Heidenheim

Caption

HEIDENHEIM
About to rub shoulders with the German elite for the first time in the Swabian club's history, the second division champions have one operational watchword: stability. Their coach Franck Schmidt has been at the helm for 16 long years, steering a club of limited financial means from the fifth tier to the top of the mountain. Much will depend on striker Tim Kleindienst, who topped the scoring charts with 25 goals last term.

DARMSTADT
After six years of struggle in the second tier, the Lilies are finally back in the top flight. Expertly led by coach Torsten Lieberknecht, they were the second-tier pacesetters for most of last season – unbeaten for 21 games between July and March – and would have secured the title if they had not become untypically sloppy at the back in the later stages of the campaign.

RB rebuild...Leipzig need to replace two of their best players

Team by team

GERMANY

AUGSBURG
Manager: Enrico Maassen
Key Arrivals: Breithaupt (Karlsruhe), Berisha (Fenerbahce), Michel (Union Berlin), Tietz (Darmstadt), Okugawa (Bielefeld), Ehrlich (Dynamo Dresden), Dahmen (Mainz), Pfeiffer (Darmstadt)
Key Departures: Pepi (PSV)
Prediction: One of the worst teams in the Bundesliga in the second half of last season, winning only four out of 17 fixtures. Apart from Germany international striker Mergim Berisha, they may not have sufficient quality to break out of that downward spiral.

BAYER LEVERKUSEN
Manager: Xabi Alonso
Key Arrivals: Arthur (America Mineiro), Grimaldo (Benfica), Xhaka (Arsenal), Hofmann (M'gladbach),
Key Departures: Bellarabi (released), Bakker (Atalanta), Paulinho (Atletico Mineiro), Sinkgraven (Las Palmas)
Prediction: Alonso performed a minor miracle on taking over from Gerardo Seoane in October, steering Leverkusen from 17th place to a lofty sixth and, thanks to an impressive summer recruitment drive, a top-four finish should not be beyond them.

BAYERN MUNICH
Manager: Thomas Tuchel
Key Arrivals: Guerreiro (Dortmund), Kim Min-jae (Napoli), Laimer (RB Leipzig)
Key Departures: Blind (Girona), Hernandez (PSG), Ranos (M'gladbach)
Prediction: Tuchel is extremely confident of overseeing a 12th straight Bundesliga title and why wouldn't he be? Bayern have the best squad by some distance, an astute tactician at the helm and are now better equipped in the executive sphere.

BOCHUM
Manager: Thomas Letsch
Key Arrivals: Bero (Vitesse), Daschner (St Pauli), Kwarteng (Magdeburg), Passlack (Dortmund)
Key Departures: Horn (Nuremberg)
Prediction: The Blues only secured their top-flight status on the final weekend of last season and another nail-biter could be on the cards. Director of sport Marc Lettau has concentrated on signing youngsters with potential, but the club needs more firepower: only one team scored fewer goals last season.

BORUSSIA DORTMUND
Manager: Edin Terzic
Key Arrivals: Nmecha (Wolfsburg), Bensebaini (M'gladbach)
Key Departures: Bellingham (Real Madrid), Dahoud (Brighton), Guerreiro (Bayern), Modeste (released), Passlack (Bochum), Braaf (Verona), Knauff (Eintracht Frankfurt), Schulz (released)
Prediction: This season will be an acid test of Dortmund's character. Will they carry the mental scars of throwing away the 2022-23 league title, or will they be sufficiently energised to set the record straight? How significant is it that senior pro Marco Reus has decided to relinquish the captaincy?

BORUSSIA MONCHENGLADBACH
Manager: Gerardo Seoane
Key Arrivals: Chiarodia (Werder), Hack (Bielefeld), Weigl (Benfica), Honorat (Brest), Cvancara (Sparta Prague), Ranos (Bayern)
Key Departures: Beyer (Burnley), Bensebaini (Dortmund), Hofmann (Leverkusen), Stindl (Karlsruhe), Thuram (Inter)
Prediction: The outlook is not good at Borussia Park. As if two frustrating seasons of mid-table inconsistency was not bad enough, the Foals endured a mass exodus of talent and experience this summer, with the loss of key forwards Marcus Thuram and Jonas Hofmann especially prejudicial.

COLOGNE
Manager: Steffen Baumgart
Key Arrivals: Chabot (Sampdoria), Christensen (Nordsjaelland), Nikisch (RB Leipzig), Waldschmidt (Wolfsburg)
Key Departures: Hector (retired), Horn (released), Skhiri (Eintracht Frankfurt), Duda (Verona), Castrop (Nuremberg)
Prediction: In his two seasons in charge, coach Baumgart has done a fine job to keep the club up on a shoestring, assembling a solid, combative side that attacks excellently on the wings. His task is much tougher now without his two most influential players, midfielder Ellyes Skhiri and left-back Jonas Hector.

DARMSTADT
Manager: Torsten Lieberknecht
Key Arrivals: Hornby (Reims), Maglica (Stuttgart), Klarer (Dusseldorf)
Key Departures: Ben Balla (Sandhausen), Bennetts (Wiesbaden), Pfeiffer (Augsburg), Tietz (Augsburg)
Prediction: A director of football at a small club once compared the challenge of operating in the Bundesliga to a dinghy racing numerous speedboats and this is exactly the position of Darmstadt, who were not even financial big-hitters in the second division. The exits of outstanding stopper Patric Pfeiffer and Phillip Tietz are huge blows.

EINTRACHT FRANKFURT
Manager: Dino Toppmoller
Key Arrivals: Koch (Leeds), Larsson (Malmo), Marmoush (Wolfsburg), Shkiri (Cologne), Pacho (Antwerp), Ngankam (Hertha), Knauff (Dortmund), Max (PSV), Bautista (Aucas), Dina Ebimbe (PSG)
Key Departures: Kamada (released), Ndicka (Roma)
Prediction: Eintracht underperformed in the Bundesliga last season, failing to win a single away game after the World Cup and finishing seventh. Champions League is the goal and the Hesse club have signed several new faces to try to make it happen.

FREIBURG
Manager: Christian Streich
Key Arrivals: Adamu (Red Bull Salzburg), F. Muller (Stuttgart), S. Muller (Schaffhausen)
Key Departures: Flekken (Brentford), Petersen (retired), Schade (Brentford), Jeong Woo-yeong (Stuttgart), Tempelmann (Schalke)
Prediction: As usual, Streich will insist survival is the only objective, but nobody should be fooled. The Black Forest side, a combination of bargain-basement buys and homegrown talent, are serial over-achievers and will be aiming for a third consecutive top-six placing. Expect brilliant winger Vincenzo Grifo to set the attacking tone.

HEIDENHEIM
Manager: Franck Schmidt
Key Arrivals: Dinkci (Werder), Gimber (Jahn Regensburg), Dovedan (Austria Vienna), Pieringer (Schalke), Traore (Osnabruck), Siersleben (Wolfsburg)
Key Departures: Geipl (released), Rittmuller (released), Burnic (Karlsruhe)
Prediction: Most observers expect immediate relegation for the top-flight rookies. Building a squad on cut-price or free transfers and German-speaking players has its limitations, but Schmidt's hard-working side will not go down without a fight. The element of surprise could cause some shocks along the way.

HOFFENHEIM
Manager: Pellegrino Matarazzo
Key Arrivals: Bulter (Schalke), Grillitsch (Ajax), Justvan (Paderborn)
Key Departures: Baumgartner (RB Leipzig), Borkovic (Sturm Graz), Rudy (released), Bicakcic (released), Dabbur (Shabab Al Ahli), Posch (Bologna)
Prediction: Sadly the Blues have the look of a Bundesliga team on borrowed time. They have been stagnating for the last three seasons and for much of last term – particularly when going winless in 14 matches – were in a sorry state. How much longer can prolific striker Andrej Kramaric carry them?

MAINZ
Manager: Bo Svensson
Key Arrivals: Krauss (RB Leipzig), Van den Berg (Liverpool), Batz (Saarbrucken)
Key Departures: Ingvartsen (Nordsjaelland), Mustapha (Como), Martin (Genoa)
Prediction: Along with Union Berlin and Freiburg, Mainz are proof that a well-run club with above-average coaching and scouting can thrive. Good enough to beat Bayern and RB Leipzig last season, the Mainzer could, with the rub of the green, qualify for Europe. Young gun striker Nelson Weiper is a fine prospect.

RB LEIPZIG
Manager: Marco Rose
Key Arrivals: Simons (PSG), Seiwald (Red Bull Salzburg), Baumgartner (Hoffenheim), Sesko (Red Bull Salzburg), Carvalho (Liverpool), Openda (Lens), Bitshiabu (PSG)
Key Departures: Laimer (Bayern), Nkunku (Chelsea), Szoboszlai (Liverpool), Martinez (Genoa), Krauss (Mainz), Angelino (Galatasaray), Halstenberg (Hannover), Nikisch (Cologne)
Prediction: Given the number of key players who have exited this summer, it's understandable that many are expecting RB to regress. All of the new faces have been bought for their potential and will need time to settle. They must defend better from set-pieces and improve their chances-to-goals ratio.

STUTTGART
Manager: Sebastian Hoeness
Key Arrivals: Milosevic (Vojvodina), Mittelstadt (Hertha), Guirassy (Rennes), Jeong Woo-yeong (Freiburg), Leweling (Union Berlin)
Key Departures: Muller (Freiburg), Kuol (Central Coast Mariners), Maglica (Darmstadt), Faghir (Elversberg)
Prediction: Fresh from successfully navigating the relegation/promotion play-offs –beating Hamburg – the Swabians will be aiming first and foremost to move into less choppy waters in 2023-24. It's a perfectly feasible goal; since Hoeness took over as coach in April, they have improved across the board.

UNION BERLIN
Manager: Urs Fischer
Key Arrivals: Aaronson (Leeds), Kaufmann (FC Copenhagen), Kral (Spartak Moscow), Leite (Porto), Fofana (Chelsea), Tousart (Hertha)
Key Departures: Michel (Augsburg), Puchacz (Kaiserslautern), Oztunali (Hamburg), Leweling (Stuttgart), Seguin (Schalke)
Prediction: A widely-held view is that Union will find it hard to secure another top-four finish in 2023-24, distracted by the club's first-ever Champions League adventure. Yet they coped with the Europa League just fine last season, and remain a class act as a defensive and counter-attacking force.

WERDER BREMEN
Manager: Ole Werner
Key Arrivals: Keita (Liverpool), Kownacki (Dusseldorf)
Key Departures: Chiarodia (M'gladbach), Dinkci (Heidenheim)
Prediction: Momentum generally plays a vital part in a team's fortunes and Werder fans will not be reassured by their team's form in the second half of last season after coming joint-bottom of the Spring Championship standings. Signing the often-injured midfielder Naby Keita is a gamble.

WOLFSBURG
Manager: Niko Kovac
Key Arrivals: Cerny (Twente), Jenz (Lorient), Tomas (Sporting), Zesiger (Young Boys)
Key Departures: Nmecha (Dortmund), Marmoush (Eintracht Frankfurt), Otavio (Al Sadd), Pongracic (Lecce), Bialek (Eupen), Siersleben (Heidenheim), Waldschmidt (Cologne)
Prediction: For a club which enjoys financial backing of car manufacture VW, missing out on European football was not quite a disaster but close to it. Patrick Wimmer and Polish winger Jakub Kaminski are fine prospects.

Chasing pack smell blood

Paris Saint-Germain's grip on the Ligue 1 trophy has rarely been as loose at the start of a new season

For the last decade, beating Paris Saint-Germain to the title has required exceptional circumstances. Monaco's 2016-17 triumph was aided by the emergence of generational talent Kylian Mbappe while COVID-enforced stadium closures characterised Lille's 2020-21 victory, robbing Paris' Parc des Princes of its impregnable aura.

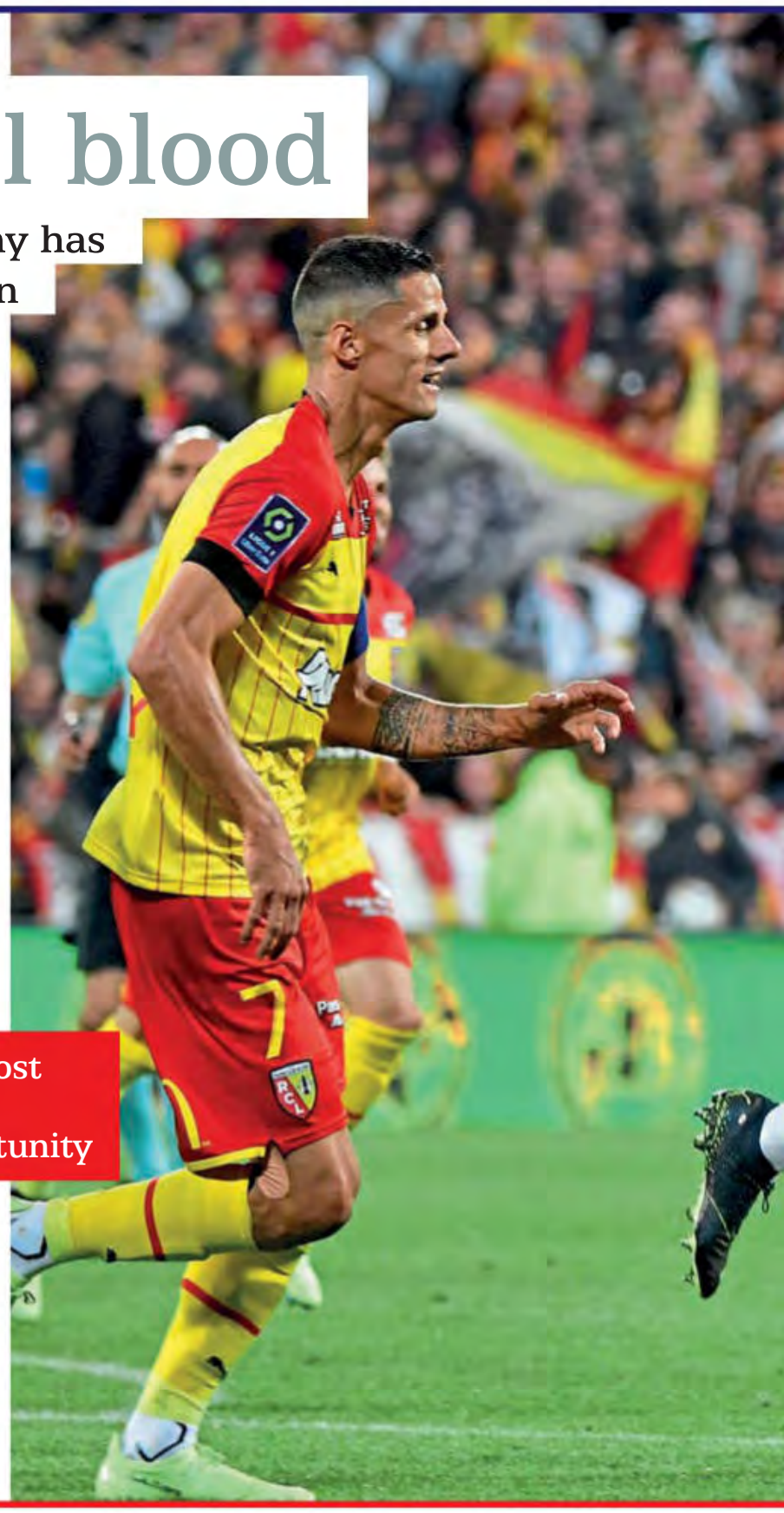
This season, however, there's a sense that PSG are at their most vulnerable for a decade and a clutch of competitive challengers sense an opportunity as the champions struggle with an existential crisis.

With Lionel Messi gone, Kylian Mbappe formally announcing that he won't sign another contract when his current one expires next summer, and Neymar, now 31, waning and understandably spooked by ultras protesting outside his house, QSI's strongest-ever PSG team (on paper) is slowly breaking up. Few of the ageing squad are sure to stay much longer. The gradual exodus carries the verdict that Paris' win-now top-heavy *Galacticos*-style recruitment policy has failed, while the meandering of Christophe Galtier's turbulent final few weeks in charge saw the project hit a new low.

PSG started the summer with full-back and goalkeeper the only areas boasting sufficient strength needed to achieve their aims. Although ideological spearhead Luis Campos remains an odd fit for a behemoth like PSG, his common sense – a rare commodity at PSG – is at least addressing balance, but the squad still feels fractured and lacking cohesion. The "end of bling-bling" promised by president Nasser Al Khelaifi last summer may be slowly coalescing but what exactly the modern PSG are if not "bling-bling" is a question that is yet to be answered.

A typically safe appointment, Luis Enrique's arrival does little to help such vagaries and, also typically, his suitability seems to have been judged on only surface details. Critics could argue the Spaniard's 2014-15 Barcelona treble benefited greatly from groundwork laid by Pep Guardiola and Tito Vilanova, plus a hugely talented team led by Messi in his prime. Although an ability to arrange and energise a selection

> There's a sense that PSG are at their most vulnerable for a decade and a clutch of competitive challengers sense an opportunity



PLAYERS TO WATCH

KEVIN DANSO
(Lens)
The Austrian was arguably Ligue 1's standout player last season, and adapting to Champions League football could be a career defining challenge for the well-rounded centre-back. Previously had a loan spell at Southampton.

MARTIN TERRIER
(Rennes)
The versatile forward was highly sought after last summer following a prolific 2021-22 campaign when he scored 21 league goals, and will want to prove he remains just as effective after a serious knee injury in January.

TIAGO DJALO
(Lille)
Djalo once promised to be Ligue 1's next breakout star centre-back, but struggled with greater responsibility and is partly to blame for the individual errors that have cost his team. Big year ahead for the ex-Portugal youth international.

AROUNA SANGANTE
(Le Havre)
Exciting 21-year-old centre-back who emerged from Le Havre's famous youth system to lead Ligue 2's best defence – and the stingiest across the top two tiers of Europe's big five leagues – conceding just 19 times in 38 games.

NETO BORGES
(Clermont)
A prime example of Clermont's low-cost but effective recruitment last summer, the efficient left-back will, like his club, be aiming to prove last year's form was no fluke. The Brazilian scored three league goals last term.

Title contenders... Lens impressed in finishing second last season

New PSG coach...Luis Enrique at his unveiling

of superstars is required at PSG, there's little evidence that Enrique can quickly and successfully build an identity from the ground up, as spells with Spain, Celta Vigo and Roma produced little success.

A host of pretenders are aiming to capitalise on PSG's vapid reboot attempt. Although a title race never emerged, Lens finished just a point behind last term and will be dangerous again if their inexperienced squad can cope with Champions League and Ligue 1 schedules. Although similarly green French squads have failed to strike that balance over the past decade, Franck Haise's ruthlessly efficient and dynamic yet defensively solid outfit have a better chance than most.

Customarily for Ligue 1 teams outside Paris, holding on to key players will be a challenge. However, although sporting director Florent Ghisolfi, who decamped for Nice last season, will be

RAYAN CHERKI
(Lyon)
Branding Cherki's progress a disappointment would be a little harsh but it's nearly four years since his dismantling of Nantes at just 16. Momentum is now gathering, however, behind perhaps Lyon's most talented graduate ever.

YEHVANN DIOUF
(Reims)
Extremely highly regarded in Champagne for some time, the 23-year-old finally ascended to senior football last term as part of Will Still's revolution. He could end this campaign as the league's leading goalkeeping talent.

GEORGES MIKAUTADZE
(Metz)
The clinical Georgian's 23 Ligue 2 goals brought links with Milan and the Premier League last campaign, but a similarly impressive season will likely be needed to keep Metz up. At 22 he already has four goals in 16 games at international level.

MANUEL UGARTE
(PSG)
A €60m signing from Sporting, the energetic ball-winning battler is the type of midfielder PSG have routinely lacked under Qatari rule. The Uruguyan's success at the Parc des Princes could be revolutionary.

ENZO LE FEE
(Rennes)
One of his generation's leading talents, the creative midfielder took time to adapt to top-flight football before adding intensity to grace last season at Lorient. Rennes is a potentially thrilling move for the 23-year-old.

New Marseille boss...Marcelino

missed, the club's precise recruitment routinely makes major departures quickly seem minor. Haise's well-drilled team are well suited to European football and the boisterous Stade Bollaert-Delelis will be a tough trip for anyone. The idea that Haise and Co could match last season's form and get out of their Champions League group is far from outlandish and another haul of 84 points could be enough to usurp PSG.

After another summer coaching switch, it would be easy to assume the usual chaos reigns at Marseille. However, sporting-director-turned-president Pablo Longoria deserves praise for maintaining a sense of relative stability and OM could yet emerge as PSG's main challengers. Despite exceeding expectations, Igor Tudor's shock departure, blaming the club's overbearing intensity, could become a positive after the Croatian fell out with or marginalised several senior players. Former Sevilla, Valencia and Villarreal coach Marcelino is a promising replacement but Marseille's title hopes rest on maximising a strong squad's potential and spending wisely to fill gaps, although the inflated €30m fee splurged in January on flop striker Vitinha could prove disastrous for squad building.

Despite finishing sixth and eighth respectively last year, traditional challengers Monaco and Lyon will threaten the Champions League spots in 2023-24. Both enjoy quality in abundance and no European distractions. Former Eintacht Frankfurt coach Adi Hutter, however, is a risky appointment for Monaco after failing at Borussia Monchengladbach. A deft hand will be needed to navigate the likely departures of various talented youngsters and the nurturing of their replacements. Meanwhile, Laurent Blanc might have underwhelmed at Lyon so far but his PSG success has improved with hindsight and, assuming he's still able to compete tactically with a newly vibrant and progressive division, he has much to work with. However, reinforcements may be minimal after authorities took a dim view of new owner John Textor's budgeting.

> Coach Marcelino is a promising replacement but Marseille's title hopes rest on maximising a strong squad's potential and spending wisely

Lille, who've suffered with individual errors despite strong displays, Rennes, who will benefit from the injury returns of unpredictable winger Jeremy Doku and graceful goalscorer Martin Terrier, and an ambitious Nice, now powered by Ghisolfi's transfer smarts, complete a highly-competitive top eight. Although the condition of their squads come September will be key, should Paris' recent slump continue even a little, any of the other seven could pose a realistic title challenge.

For PSG, another title would be of little consequence. Instead, it's the manner in which it might be won and what their season says about the post-bling era under Enrique that will define narratives. Identity matters for elite clubs aiming for success at the highest level. Although the on-going battle with an overly-glamorous reputation is far from won, Campos and Enrique will have to simultaneously discern what replaces it. The biggest challenge for the club will be reconciling an unbending demand for success with the notion that a much needed identity can't be bought, and that things may need to get worse before they get better.

Adam White

Back in contention ...Monaco and Lyon

PROMOTED TEAMS

Back in the big time... Le Havre

LE HAVRE
The Normandy outfit's surprise second-tier title triumph was based on a well-organised structure and the emergence of several graduates from the club's legendary academy. Having failed with Amiens in Ligue 1, coach Luka Elsner's success was just as shocking and his ability to adapt again to the top flight is uncertain. Goals will also be an issue, with nobody scoring more than six last term, but quality in other areas offers a strong starting point.

METZ
Surprisingly promoted after various rivals choked, significant investment will likely be needed to mould a competitive Ligue 1 squad. Although Romanian coach Laszlo Boloni blooded some promising youth products, Georges Mikautadze's goals were pivotal in the success of a side made up of players who have struggled in the top flight before. Midfield is a particular weakness in a group lacking any real depth.

Team by team

FRANCE

BREST
Manager: Eric Roy
Key Arrivals: Camara (Saint-Etienne), Satriano (Inter), Martin (Lille)
Key Departures: Honorat (M'gladbach)
Prediction: Extremely lucky to survive last season thanks to Ligue 1's unusually weak bottom third, the new campaign could be one step too far for an understrength team who finally lost talismanic forward Franck Honorat. Workmanlike and badly lacking creativity, avoiding the bottom three will be tough.

CLERMONT
Manager: Pascal Gastien
Key Arrivals: Keita (Lyon), Caufriez (Spartak Moscow), Boutobba (Niort)
Key Departures: Khaoui (Khor Fakkan)
Prediction: Some shrewd scouting and a tough-to-beat yet bold set-up equalled a scarcely believable 59-point haul last term. More of the same style, while holding onto their better players, should see Ligue 1's smallest club survive again, although another top-half finish seems unlikely.

LE HAVRE
Manager: Luka Elsner
Key Arrivals: Salmier (Troyes), Nego (Fehervar), Ndiaye (Sochaux)
Key Departures: Lekhal (Umm Salal)
Prediction: Goals will be an issue for the lowest scorers in Ligue 2's top six last term, but a fast-improving side powered by a sprinkling of exciting academy products makes for an intriguing and difficult to beat proposition – just 19 goals were conceded last term. Coach Elsner has much to prove though.

LENS
Manager: Franck Haise
Key Arrivals: Diouf (Basel), Spierings (Toulouse), Guilavogui (Paris FC), El Aynaoui (Nancy), Cortes (Millonarios)
Key Departures: Onana (Besiktas), Boura (Troyes), Openda (RB Leipzig), Fofana (Al Nassr), Buksa (Antalyaspor)
Prediction: The rigours of Champions League football should affect hopes of a title challenge but one of Europe's leading young coaches in Haise has only ever surprised Ligue 1 observers. Replacing both inspirational captain Seko Fofana and top goalscorer Lois Openda could prove impossible.

LILLE
Manager: Paulo Fonseca
Key Arrivals: Haraldsson (FC Copenhagen)
Key Departures: Weah (Juventus), Bamba (Celta Vigo), Fonte (Braga) Martin (Brest)
Prediction: Stats models suggest that Lille's tenth and fifth-place finishes, following their 2021 title, were major underperformances. Replacing the prolific and (probably) outbound Jonathan David will be tough, but wily coach Fonseca boasts a settled, improving and well-balanced squad. Another title challenge is plausible.

LORIENT
Manager: Regis Le Bris
Key Arrivals: F. Mendy (Amiens), Faivre (Bournemouth), B. Mendy (Man City), Sylla (Laval)
Key Departures: Moffi (Nice), Le Fee (Rennes), Jenz (Wolfsburg)
Prediction: Last year's surprise package could be picked apart in the window with creator-in-chief Le Fee's exit for Rennes a significant early setback. If rising star coach Le Bris stays, another mid-table finish is possible but they'll be looking down rather than up. Last season's post-World Cup form gives concern.

LYON
Manager: Laurent Blanc
Key Arrivals: Mata (Club Brugge)
Key Departures: Ozkacar (Valencia), Aouar (Roma), Boateng (released), Dembele (released), Keita (Clermont), Faivre (Bournemouth), Ndiaye (Troyes)
Prediction: Although ageing coach Blanc's suitability to modern football remains uncertain, the quality produced by the club's prolific academy, both old and young, means a top-four spot is more than achievable. Financial restrictions under new owner John Textor could hinder progress, however.

MARSEILLE
Manager: Marcelino
Key Arrivals: Kondogbia (Atletico Madrid), Aubameyang (Chelsea), Lodi (Atletico Madrid)
Key Departures: Milik (Juventus), Kolasinac (Atalanta), Payet (released)
Prediction: Like Monaco before them, perceptions of the season could hinge on success in the Champions League qualifiers. The astute Marcelino is an intriguing appointment but longer-term success may depend on addressing the balance between hits and misses in the transfer market.

METZ
Manager: Laszlo Boloni
Key Arrivals: Elisor (Seraing)
Key Departures: Gueye (Paris FC), Traore (Wolves), Niane (Angers)
Prediction: Promoted thanks to Bordeaux's late collapse, having relied heavily on Georgian striker Georges Mikautadze's run of 16 goals in 19 games after Christmas, a squad suited to Ligue 2 will need overhauling to survive in the condensed 18-team division. Relegation favourites.

MONACO
Manager: Adi Hutter
Key Arrivals: Kohn (Red Bull Salzburg)
Key Departures: Jean Lucas (Santos), Marcelin (Bordeaux)
Prediction: Expectations have become the club's worst enemy. Sackings of Niko Kovac and Philippe Clement both felt hasty and results have remained largely constant. New man Adi Hutter won't have Europe to worry about but could see a talented squad picked apart by September.

MONTPELLIER
Manager: Michel Der Zakarian
Key Arrivals: Omeragic (Zurich), Al Taamari (OH Leuven)
Key Departures: Kamara (Pau)
Prediction: An impressive post-Christmas run under returning journeyman Der Zakarian suggests Montpellier will sneak into the top half, assuming a key group of young players aren't lured away come September. With captain Teji Savanier around, however, much is possible.

NANTES
Manager: Pierre Aristouy
Key Arrivals: Mohamed (Galatasaray)
Key Departures: Blas (Rennes), Delort (Umm Salal), Corchia (Amiens)
Prediction: Repeating the over-performance engineered by departing head coach Antoine Kombouare will be tough with key players likely to be sold. Barring major investment, another relegation battle is likely.

NICE
Manager: Francesco Farioli
Key Arrivals: Moffi (Lorient)
Key Departures: Dolberg (Anderlecht), Barkley (released), Viti (Sassuolo), Ramsey (Cardiff), Ilie (Lausanne)
Prediction: Little appears to have changed despite Jim Ratcliffe's INEOS investment. Infighting and hurried, scattergun recruitment saw last season written off and Ratcliffe's Manchester United dalliance could delay proceedings again, while new coach Farioli is a gamble. Yet inherent quality makes Europe distinctly possible.

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN
Manager: Luis Enrique
Key Arrivals: Ugarte (Sporting), Hernandez (Bayern), Ekitike (Reims), Lee Kang-in (Mallorca), Asensio (Real Madrid), Skriniar (Inter), Ndour (Benfica), Simons (PSV)
Key Departures: Messi (Inter Miami), Ramos (released), Icardi (Galatasaray), Bitshiabu (RB Leipzig), Simons (RB Leipzig), Dina Ebimbe (Eintracht Frankfurt)
Prediction: Although PSG are the clear title favourites, the reigning champions are vulnerable. Enrique is a safe pair of hands and Luis Campos' common sense approach has led to some useful signings, but competition is growing and a transitional year seems likely. Only half of coaches under the QSI regime have won Ligue 1 in their first season.

REIMS
Manager: Will Still
Key Arrivals: Teuma (Union SG)
Key Departures: Ekitike (PSG), Donis (APOEL Nicosia), Hornby (Darmstadt), Kebbel (Paris FC),
Prediction: Still just 30, a first full season will be the acid test of Still's sky-high coaching stock. Modern and innovative, his team initially went 19 games unbeaten but, after winning just one of their last nine, the jury is still out. Top scorer Folarin Balogun will be tough to replace and relegation could soon be a concern.

RENNES
Manager: Bruno Genesio
Key Arrivals: Le Fee (Lorient), Blas (Nantes), Gallon (Troyes)
Key Departures: Bade (Sevilla), Guirassy (Stuttgart), Traore (Real Sociedad), Alemdar (Troyes)
Prediction: A stacked, vibrant squad will aim for the Champions League but coach Genesio remains an enigma. Inconsistency and a constant search for balance have plagued his reign and consecutive top-four finishes have actually underwhelmed when considering his team's devastating best.

STRASBOURG
Manager: Patrick Vieira
Key Arrivals: Sylla (Club Brugge)
Key Departures: Le Marchand (retired), Lienard (Bastia), Djiku (Fenerbahce)
Prediction: Injuries and misfortune suggest last season's struggles were perhaps unrepresentative of this team's true level following a top-six finish in 2021-22. However, Habib Diallo's goals (20 last term), an energetic midfield and a capable defence should be energised by Chelsea's investment and the underrated appointment of Vieira.

TOULOUSE
Manager: Carles Martinez Novell
Key Arrivals: Cissoko (NEC), Casseres Jr (New York Red Bulls), Gelabert (Mirandes), Magri (Bastia)
Key Departures: Van den Boomen (Ajax), Dejaegere (Charlotte), Spierings (Lens), Healey (Watford), Sanna (Laval), Birmancevic (Sparta Prague), Hamulic (Vitesse)
Prediction: The shock domestic cup winners became the neutral's favourites thanks to an energetic, gung-ho style while their data-driven model unearthed some unexpected quality. Internal friction saw a toxic end to the year and replacing all three starting midfielders will be tough, but the innovative outfit should have enough to survive.

Up for grabs

The Serie A title race remains the most open and competitive of all Europe's top five leagues

PLAYERS TO WATCH

DAVIDE FRATTESI
(Internazionale)
One of *World Soccer*'s players to watch in last year's season preview, the six-cap Italy international made his big move this summer, joining Inter on loan from Sassuolo. Both Simone Inzaghi and Roberto Mancini expect.

ALESSANDRO BUONGIORNO
(Torino)
The 23-year-old central defender for Ivan Juric's competitive Torino is one of the players selected by Mancini to be part of Italy's future. Won his first cap this summer in Italy's 3-2 win over the Netherlands.

MAXIME LOPEZ
(Sassuolo)
A former Marseille and France U21 midfielder, 25-year-old Lopez is yet another incredible talent to emerge from the celebrated Sassuolo school. His quality football has put him on many clubs' shopping list.

RUBEN LOFTUS-CHEEK
(Milan)
Joins his fellow Chelsea academy graduate Fikayo Tomori after almost 20 years with the London club. A gifted midfielder whose fitness record means he has never started more than 21 league matches in a season.

LORENZO LUCCA
(Udinese)
Signed on loan from Serie B side Pisa by Udinese this summer, Italy U21 international striker Lucca has just finished a season with Ajax, making him the first-ever Italian to play for the Amsterdam club.

Star man...Khvicha Kvaratskhelia will lead Napoli's title defence

Two questions dominate preparations for the forthcoming Serie A season: firstly, in the wake of their Herculean efforts to win last season's title, will Napoli under new coach Rudi Garcia be able to reproduce anything like the high-intensity, dynamic football that won them the third title of their history with Luciano Spalletti?

Secondly, in the wake of the *"Prisma" Plusvalenza* (Capital Gains) scandal, are Juventus destined to decline under the weight of possible UEFA sanctions that could ban them from all European competition? The very real possibility that Juventus, who finished seventh in last season's league, might be barred from the UEFA Europa Conference League may have far reaching implications for the club.

Already out of the Champions League because of a ten-point Italian Football Federation (FIGC) sanction imposed at a federation appeals hearing in May, heavily indebted Juventus can clearly ill-afford the loss of lucrative Champions League earnings. Without the points sanction, the Old Lady would have finished on 72 points alongside third-placed Inter and thus qualified for the lucrative Champions League.

As of now, the big question concerns Rudi Garcia. Can he rekindle the extraordinary tension, fire and commitment of last season?

In some senses, Napoli's title win and Juve's involvement in the *Plusvalenza* scandal represent the dynamically opposed lightning rods of today's Italian football. On the one hand, we had a hugely popular celebration of a third title win for Napoli, marked by some wonderful football and by the huge emotional impact of the late Diego Maradona, the man who almost singlehandedly won those first two titles. On the other hand, we have Italy's most successful club, Juventus, involved in yet another scandal.

Rebuild...Napoli president Aurelio De Laurentiis (L) and his new coach Rudi Garcia (R)

Back in the early 2000s, Juve were involved in a three-year long trial in Turin relating to the club's medical practices during the 1990s, in which their then-club doctor, Riccardo Agricola, was first convicted (in 2004) and then a year later acquitted of "sporting fraud" (use of prohibited substances). Hot on the heels of that came the infamous *Calciopoli* match-fixing scandal which saw Juventus relegated from Serie A in 2006.

In truth, the *Plusvalenza* scandal totally changed the nature of Napoli's magical season in that it ripped the heart out of Juventus, thus removing one of the Neapolitan club's most powerful rivals from the title race.

FABIANO PARISI
(Fiorentina)
With 11 Italy U21 caps, defender Parisi is another Mancini "Next Generation" contender who after three seasons with Empoli (two in Serie A) was signed by Fiorentina in July for approximately €10m. A Benevento graduate.

LAZAR SAMARDZIC
(Udinese)
After two seasons with Udinese, the Berlin-born 21-year-old has attracted much attention. So much so that Serbia persuaded him to opt for them in February, immediately capping him for a Euro 2024 qualifier.

HOUSSEM AOUAR
(Roma)
Long-time key figure in the Lyon squad, 25-year-old playmaker Aouar could do very well in his first season in the Italian capital. Born in Lyon to Algerian parents, in January he opted to play for the North African nation instead of France.

GIORGI KVERNADZE
(Frosinone)
In signing the 20-year-old Georgian, Frosinone are hoping that lightning will strike twice, given the monumental, title-winning success of his compatriot Kvaratskhelia at Napoli last season. His reported lack of pace urges caution.

BOULAYE DIA
(Salernitana)
Became a national figure on the night of April 30 when he scored an 84th-minute equaliser against Napoli to delay the Neapolitan title celebrations for four days. That notoriety could earn the 26-year-old Senegal striker a new club.

Champions League finalists... Internazionale are in good shape

This is not to say that Napoli would not have won the title anyway. Their supersonic autumn, during which they won 13 of their first 15 league matches including away games at Lazio, Milan and Roma, while at the same time topping their Champions League group, set them well on their way towards silverware.

As of now, the big question concerns Rudi Garcia. Can he rekindle the extraordinary tension, fire and commitment of last season? Back in the autumn of 2013, when he coached Roma, he revved them up for an incredible ten straight wins in their opening ten games. Will he have the same hold on this Napoli squad, a team that seems well suited to his attacking approach? It is worth reflecting on the words of former Milan and Italy coach Arrigo Sacchi when asked recently by *Gazzetta dello Sport* to assess Spalletti's side: "In the past, Napoli won the title thanks to the genius of one individual who just happened to be the best in the world, Diego Maradona, the guiding light of that team. Without him, there was only darkness.

> Napoli have to start as favourites, all the more so if they manage to hold on to enough of last season's star players

"Now, this Napoli has a constructive game, a strong squad. This is a notable leap of quality, an evolution."

Napoli, who in the end finished 16 points clear of second-place Lazio, have to start as favourites, all the more so if they manage to hold on to enough of last season's star players, like captain Giovanni Di Lorenzo, Stanislav Lobotka, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Hirving Lozano, Victor Osimhen and others.

As for their rivals? Champions League losing finalists, Inter, look the strongest, but that was true at this stage last year. Milan have just dumped director Paolo Maldini, one of the strategists behind their recent success. The Romans, Roma and Lazio, never look quite the full shilling. Juventus, as we have indicated, have other things to deal with. Fiorentina have just had a great season but they ultimately did not win anything.

In short, all to play for.

Paddy Agnew

Scandal-ridden...can Juve bounce back?

PROMOTED TEAMS

Serie B champions ...Frosinone

FROSINONE
Frosinone's third season in Serie A represents a huge achievement both for the Lazio-based club and its owner Maurizio Stirpe, who is hoping to establish a third force in the Lazio region behind Roma and Lazio in the capital city. By focusing on the club's regional identity, building his own stadium in Frosinone as well as two club sports centres, he may well achieve his aims.

GENOA
Genoa's swift return to Serie A, after one season in Serie B, marks the return of one of Italy's most historically important clubs. The Genoa Cricket and Football Club, founded in 1893 by English merchants based in the port of Genoa, has traditionally been seen as an important foundation stone in the edifice of modern Italian football. *Bentornato*, Genoa.

CAGLIARI
The "Tinker Man" is back. 71-year-old Claudio Ranieri, the inspiration behind Leicester City's shock 2016 Premier League title win, is back in Serie A, having guided Cagliari to a Serie A promotion 33 years after managing the same trick at the beginning of his managerial career. All the more impressive by the fact that he only took over at Christmas.

Team by team

ITALY

ATALANTA
Manager: Gian Piero Gasperini
Key Arrivals: Kolasinac (Marseille), Adopo (Torino), Bakker (Leverkusen)
Key Departures: Sportiello (Milan), Lammers (Rangers), Cittadini (Monza)
Prediction: After astonishing seasons, which saw them reach a Champions League quarter-final, Atalanta may have returned to their "proper level". They were still good enough to finish fifth and qualify for the Europa League last season. With Gasperini still in charge, expect another good campaign.

BOLOGNA
Manager: Thiago Motta
Key Arrivals: Moro (Dynamo Moscow), Beukema (AZ), Posch (Hoffenheim), El Azzouzi (Union SG)
Key Departures: Kasius (AZ)
Prediction: Bologna had an excellent season last time around, finishing comfortably mid-table. Not surprisingly, Motta was given the job full-time. The big question is whether the Canadian owners will settle for a mid-table finish again or be more ambitious.

CAGLIARI
Manager: Claudio Ranieri
Key Arrivals: Sulemana (Verona), Scuffet (CFR Cluj), Jankto (Getafe), Augello (Sampdoria)
Key Departures: Walukiewicz (Empoli), Millico (Ascoli), Barreca (Sampdoria)
Prediction: Notwithstanding all the inevitable good that will greet the return of Ranieri, the grand old man could have a difficult time ensuring Serie A survival. His charisma, much boosted by his key role in securing promotion, might just swing it.

EMPOLI
Manager: Paolo Zanetti
Key Arrivals: Walukiewicz (Cagliari), Maldini (Milan), Ranocchia (Juventus), Grassi (Parma), Luperto (Napoli)
Key Departures: Vicario (Tottenham), Parisi (Fiorentina)
Prediction: Empoli started last season with a bang, beating Juve 1-0 in Turin. In the end they finished a comfortable 14th, 12 points clear of relegation. No surprise that Zanetti is still in charge; a repeat of last season would do nicely.

FIORENTINA
Manager: Vincenzo Italiano
Key Arrivals: Parisi (Empoli), Arthur (Juventus)
Key Departures: Rasmussen (Brondby), Venuti (Lecce), Bianco (Reggiana)
Prediction: Fiorentina's excellent 2022-23 season ultimately ended frustratingly with two cup final defeats. Another strong campaign seems on the cards – especially if a disqualification of Juventus sees them play in the UEFA Conference League again – after Italiano turned down approaches from Napoli.

FROSINONE
Manager: Eusebio Di Francesco
Key Arrivals: Brescianinni (Milan), Kvernadze (Kolkheti Poti)
Key Departures: Ricci (Sampdoria)
Prediction: Just in case they'd forgotten how tough life is in Serie A, Frosinone return with a home game v reigning champions Napoli. With new coach Di Francesco – Fabio Grosso stepped down at the end of last season – and new signings, they might be up to the task.

GENOA
Manager: Alberto Gilardino
Key Arrivals: Leali (Ascoli), Sommariva (Pescara), Martin (Mainz), Puscas (Reading), Martinez (RB Leipzig)
Key Departures: Czyborra (PEC Zwolle)
Prediction: Back in Serie A after just one season away, Genoa believe that former Parma and Italy striker, Alberto Gilardino, can lead them to safety having led them to promotion.

INTERNAZIONALE
Manager: Simone Inzaghi
Key Arrivals: Thuram (M'gladbach), Frattesi (Sassuolo), Bisseck (Aarhus), Cuadrado (Juventus), Acerbi (Lazio)
Key Departures: Brozovic (Al Nassr), Gagliardini (Monza), Skriniar (PSG), Dzeko (Fenerbahce), Pinamonti (Sassuolo), Handanovic (released), Satriano (Brest), Onana (Man Utd), Vanheusden (Standard Liege), Carboni (Monza), Mulattieri (Sassuolo), Zanotti (St Gallen), Males (Young Boys)
Prediction: Despite their inconsistent league form in 2022-23, Inter had a highly satisfactory season, winning the Italian Cup and Super Cup as well as reaching the Champions League final. No surprise that Inzaghi remains. Another good season is expected.

JUVENTUS
Manager: Massimiliano Allegri
Key Arrivals: Milik (Marseille), Locatelli (Sassuolo), Kean (Everton), Weah (Lille)
Key Departures: Di Maria (Benfica), Cuadrado (Inter), Kulusevski (Tottenham), Ranocchia (Empoli), Arthur (Fiorentina)
Prediction: All the signs are that this will be a very difficult season for the once all-powerful Old Lady. It remains to be seen what sanctions, if any, UEFA will impose, with the club facing the very real threat of disqualification from the Europa Conference League.

LAZIO
Manager: Maurizio Sarri
Key Arrivals: Castellanos (New York City FC), Cancellieri (Verona)
Key Departures: Milinkovic-Savic (Al Hilal), Acerbi (Inter), Romero (Milan), Moro (Real Valladolid), Escalante (Cadiz)
Prediction: Ask Lazio owner Claudio Lotito if his club are title candidates after surprisingly finishing second last season and he refers to the example of Leicester in the Premier League, saying "everything is possible". Having sold Sergej Milinkovic-Savic after eight seasons, Lazio need reinforcements.

LECCE
Manager: Roberto D'Aversa
Key Arrivals: Pongracic (Wolfsburg), Falcone (Sampdoria), Rafia (Pescara), Venuti (Fiorentina),
Key Departures: Colombo (Milan), Falcone (Sampdoria), Luicioni (Palermo), Cassandro (Como)
Prediction: Back in Serie A last term, Lecce did well under Marco Baroni, staying steadfastly clear of the drop zone to eventually finish 16th. Serie A survival will obviously be the major initial objective of experienced coach D'Aversa, who replaces Verona-bound Baroni.

MILAN
Manager: Stefano Pioli
Key Arrivals: Loftus-Cheek (Chelsea), Pulisic (Chelsea), Romero (Lazio), Sportiello (Atalanta), Colombo (Lecce), Reijnders (AZ)
Key Departures: Tonali (Newcastle), Ibrahimovic (retired), Maldini (Empoli)
Prediction: The most surprising moment for Milan's last season came in June when the club sacked directors Paolo Maldini and Ricky Massara, the two biggest components in Milan's 2021-22 Serie A title win and reaching last season's Champions League semi-final. How will the club survive without them and also without Sandro Tonali?

MONZA
Manager: Raffaele Palladino
Key Arrivals: Cittadini (Atalanta), Gagliardini (Inter), Mari (Arsenal), Petagna (Napoli), Carboni (Inter)
Key Departures: Mancuso (Palermo), Cragno (Sassulo)
Prediction: The club's immediate future is uncertain following the death of owner Silvio Berlusconi in June. The old wizard worked his magic as Monza finished 11th last season, their first in Serie A. Speculation suggests the Berlusconi family may sell the club.

NAPOLI
Manager: Rudi Garcia
Key Arrivals: Raspadori (Sassuolo), Simeone (Verona)
Key Departures: Kim Min-jae (Bayern), Luperto (Empoli), Petagna (Monza)
Prediction: Two fundamental questions about champions Napoli: first, can their new coach get the squad back to the high-octane intensity that marked last season's title win? Secondly, can they resist big-money offers for their leading superstars such as Victor Osimhen?

ROMA
Manager: Jose Mourinho
Key Arrivals: Ndicka (Eintracht Frankfurt), Aouar (Lyon), Llorente (Leeds), Kristensen (Leeds)
Key Departures: Kluivert (Bournemouth), Tahirovic (Ajax), Volpato (Sassuolo), Darboe (LASK)
Prediction: All in all, given his squad, Mourinho had an excellent second season with Roma, taking them to the Europa League final and finishing sixth in Serie A. Can the new signings improve their prospect further? Good for Roma if Paulo Dybala stays.

SALERNITANA
Manager: Paulo Sousa
Key Arrivals: Dia (Villarreal), Candreva (Sampdoria)
Key Departures: None
Prediction: After arriving in February, Portuguese head coach Paulo Sousa was so impressive in steering the club to safety that he was considered for the top job at Napoli. The fact that he is staying is a big boost for Salernitana, who still have their work cut out.

SASSUOLO
Manager: Alessio Dionisi
Key Arrivals: Cragno (Monza), Pinamonti (Inter), Volpato (Roma), Viti (Nice), Mulattieri (Inter)
Key Departures: Raspadori (Napoli), Traore (Bournemouth), Ayhan (Galatasaray), Frattesi (Inter), Locatelli (Juventus)
Prediction: By the time the season kicks off, Sassuolo are likely to have lost experienced Italian international forward Domenico Berardi, who is wanted by Roma, Lazio and Juventus. Dionisi, one of the new wave of Italian coaches, will be looking to improve on last season's 13th-place finish.

TORINO
Manager: Ivan Juric
Key Arrivals: Ilic (Verona), Popa (Voluntari)
Key Departures: Adopo (Atalanta)
Prediction: Another lively season from Torino saw Juric's side finish tenth for the second time in two seasons, after at one point looking like possible Europa Conference League qualifiers. Another lively season and another mid-table finish looks on the cards, probably much thanks to Juric's coaching skills.

UDINESE
Manager: Andrea Sottil
Key Arrivals: Lucca (Pisa), Quina (Watford), Camara (Huddersfield)
Key Departures: Becao (Fenerbahce), Benkovic (Trabzonspor), Martins (Watford), Arslan (Melbourne City), Buta (Gil Vicente)
Prediction: As usual, Udinese gave their fans plenty to shout about last season, eventually finishing 12th. Coach Sottil has been confirmed and there is no reason not to expect more of the same from them this season. Sure to be last-minute activity in the transfer market.

VERONA
Manager: Marco Baroni
Key Arrivals: Duda (Cologne), Braaf (Dortmund), Mboula (Mallorca)
Key Departures: Ilic (Torino), Simeone (Napoli), Cancellieri (Lazio), Sulemana (Cagliari), Cetin (Ankaragucu)
Prediction: No one can say Verona had it easy last season, going through three different head coaches and surviving with a dramatic 3-1 win over Spezia in an end-of-season play-off, having tied with them on 31 points. Their battle-hardened nature will stand them in good stead, while Baroni did a good job with Lecce.

All eyes on Ajax

The Amsterdam giants have undergone a summer of change after last season's struggles

Since first Marc Overmars and then Erik ten Hag left last year, Ajax have been tumbling down with the speed of an avalanche. Last season, for the first time since 2018 (excluding 2020 when competitions were halted due to COVID), they didn't win any silverware and even failed to qualify for the Champions League preliminaries. As is so often the case when top clubs fail, "Judgement Day" was inevitable. Coach Alfred Schreuder was the first to receive his marching orders, then his successor, interim coach John Heitinga, was told he wasn't the right man for the permanent job. Technical director Gerry Hamstra also called it a day and eventually the position of chief executive Edwin van der Sar became untenable. The ex-Ajax, Manchester United and Netherlands goalkeeper was later rushed to a hospital in Croatia after suffering a brain haemorrhage on holiday.

New director of football Sven Mislintat, a 50-year-old German who has worked at Borussia Dortmund, Arsenal and Stuttgart in the past, must have raised his eyebrows on discovering a chaotic situation when he arrived in Amsterdam.

Yet if anything, his first decision created further turmoil, appointing Maurice Steijn – who led Sparta to a remarkable sixth place, just missing out European football – as new head coach. Immediately critics pointed out that the 49-year-old coach hasn't got the Ajax DNA, was a sub-par midfielder (like his predecessors Ten Hag and Schreuder) during his playing days, has always worked with clubs avoiding relegation instead of trying to win titles, had failed to blood youth players at his previous clubs and is known for pragmatic football rather than the adventurous style they prefer in Amsterdam.

Mislintat believes that Steijn can punch above his weight, just like he did at Sparta and VVV-Venlo in the past. "Maurice has been active as a trainer for roughly 20 years. With all the clubs he worked for, the results exceeded the expectations. He has shown multiple times that he is a real over-performer."

In an attempt to placate critics, ex-Ajax academy graduate Hedwiges Maduro was appointed as Steijn's assistant, but it will take much more to win over the

PLAYERS TO WATCH

MEXX MEERDINK
(AZ)
Prolific goalscorer, extremely dangerous in the penalty box, who won the UEFA Youth Cup. Could soon end the Netherlands' search for a top-class No.9. Son of one-time international Martijn.

DAVID HANCKO
(Feyenoord)
Reliable, strong in the air and rarely puts a foot wrong, the Slovakia centre-back played a pivotal role in Feyenoord's title success after joining from Sparta Prague last summer.

NOA LANG
(PSV)
Dutch football's *enfant terrible*, winger Lang has now been on the books at all of the Eredivisie's "Big Three" after joining PSV. Often blows hot and cold but absolutely thrilling on his day.

Rebuild needed ...Ajax finished 2022-23 without any silverware

New era...Ajax director of football Sven Mislintat (L) and new head coach Maurice Steijn (R)

naysayers. The mass exodus of top players since Ten Hag's departure continued with Jurrien Timber joining Arsenal and Dusan Tadic moving to Fenerbahce. At the time of writing, the only new arrivals were Branco van den Boomen (Toulouse) and Benjamin Tahirovic (Roma), which won't be enough for Steijn to succeed in his mission.

Meanwhile, some 30 kilometres east, across the water, there is an entirely different mood. Almere City will be competing in the Eredivisie for the first time in their history after winning promotion via the play-offs, completing an extraordinary journey. It isn't just recognition for the club but also for the city, as well as the province of Flevoland, which has only existed since 1986 and is largely formed by reclaimed land from Lake IJssel.

The football club's history, however, goes back much further. In the late 1950s, supporters of BVC Amsterdam, nicknamed *De Zwarte Schapen* (The Black Sheep), decided to form their own club after – in their eyes – a few mergers too many. The new club, renamed De Zwarte Schapen, played in the amateur ranks and by the 1990s were going nowhere.

Yet chairman Richard Smith, a physiotherapist who had Marco van Basten and Ruud Gullit among his customers, had high ambitions. In 1995, he moved the club to Almere, a city with ambitions to host a professional football club. In 2005, the club turned professional and joined the Dutch second division, and they are still the youngest professional football club in the country.

For many years, they were a laughing stock, perceived as an overly ambitious and unrealistic project. Constant name changes – from De Zwarte Schapen to Sporting Flevoland to FC Omniworld and, finally, to Almere City FC in 2010 – didn't help, nor did the failed attempt to create a multi-sport operation under the Omniworld umbrella, incorporating basketball and volleyball teams. Their stadium, situated in the middle of nowhere, has borne some hallucinatory sponsor names, originally the Mitsubishi Forklift Stadium and now the Yanmar Stadium, named after a manufacturer of agricultural machinery, and had its first-ever professional match abandoned in 2005 after the new artificial pitch was rejected.

> **New director of football Sven Mislintat must have raised his eyebrows on discovering a chaotic situation when he arrived in Amsterdam**

Yet, somehow, they didn't surrender and in recent times Almere City – where former Tottenham Hotspur player and Dutch international Vincent Janssen launched his career – pursued promotion. In the end, it was under Alex Pastoor, a former coach at AZ and Heerenveen, that they made the final step.

Traditionally, newcomers face a difficult time in the Eredivisie. However, with 220,000 inhabitants there is potential for the Netherlands' eighth-largest city to be a survivor in the long term. It could be that Almere have the last laugh.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

Big three ready for battle

Unfamiliar stability and exciting signings at Portugal's biggest clubs whet the appetite for new season

Challengers... Sporting showed their potential in Europe last season

If Benfica are to justify their status as favourites for the 2023-24 Primeira Liga, they will have to do what no team has done in the last six years in Portugal – retain their championship title.

When the Eagles won the league for a fourth successive time in 2016-17, it appeared the country's most popular club had definitively wrested dominance of the local football landscape from arch-rivals Porto, shattering decades of hegemony by the Dragons. But since then the title has alternated between Lisbon and Porto; none of Porto, Benfica or Sporting have been able to follow up a championship triumph with another.

A common theme of stability among the "Big Three" points to another competitive season at the top. At the time of writing, the traditional title contenders had all retained their head coach: Porto's Sergio Conceicao has been at the Estadio do Dragao since 2017, his six years at the helm making him the club's longest serving post-war manager; Ruben Amorim – assuming he remains in the hot seat until the end of the season – will achieve the same feat at Sporting, overtaking Paulo Bento's four-year stint. Roger Schmidt has only been at Benfica for one season, yet it was such a resounding success that club and manager have sworn allegiance to each other for the foreseeable future, materialised in the form of a contract until 2026.

It is a noteworthy shift from the non-stop cycle of quick-fire sackings and appointments at Portugal's top clubs. In a league that only three clubs can legitimately aspire to win, failing to finish top was historically viewed as failure and a signal to give someone else a try. This century, however, the lengthy stints afforded to Jorge Jesus

PLAYERS TO WATCH

JOAO NEVES
(Benfica)
The 18-year-old Algarve native was surprisingly thrown into the Benfica engine room at the tail end of last season, his nerveless and dynamic displays auguring a brilliant future.

ABEL RUIZ
(Braga)
The 23-year-old striker has made steady progress over three years at Braga. Boosted by a brilliant U21 Euros campaign for Spain – despite his final penalty miss – it could be time for him to explode.

VIKTOR GYOKERES
(Sporting)
Sporting's record signing will hope to maintain the strong tradition of successful Swedes in the Portuguese league, such as Mats Magnusson, Stefan Schwarz and Victor Lindelof.

Top two...Benfica and Porto will battle for the title again

at Benfica, Jesualdo Ferreira at Porto, and Bento and now Amorim at Sporting indicate that clubs see the value of creating a settled environment in the dugout, amidst the helter-skelter never-ending squad reformulations of modern football.

Talking of which, Portuguese football usually gets noticed in the summer owing to its expensive transfer outgoings, but occasionally it is a big-name arrival that steals the headlines. Step forward Angel Di Maria. Like the signings of Peter Schmeichel at Sporting and Iker Casillas at Porto, the capture of Di Maria is a boon not only for his club, Benfica, but for Portuguese football as a whole. As a bona fide global superstar, the Argentinian returns to the Estadio da Luz after lighting up the league for three years when first landing in Europe as a 19-year-old back in 2007.

In early July, thousands of Benfica fans welcomed Di Maria back to Lisbon in a ceremony outside the stadium, next to the Eusebio statue, that started at 19:04 to coincide with the year the club was founded.

"I had lots of offers from all over the place, but what excited me was coming back here," said the 35-year-old World Cup winner. "What I'm feeling now is unique and unparalleled, something inexplicable. I want to thank you all for coming here to receive me."

> A common theme of stability among the "Big Three" points to another competitive season at the top

Turkey's Orkun Kokcu has also signed for Benfica, while in the green half of Lisbon, Sweden striker Viktor Gyokeres has penned a long-term deal at Sporting. Both players had been linked with moves to clubs in more prestigious leagues after tearing it up in the Eredivisie (Feyenoord) and the English Championship (Coventry City) respectively.

Perhaps they were encouraged by strong European campaigns from Portugal's representatives last year. Benfica reached the Champions League quarter-finals, Porto were unlucky to miss out on joining them in the last eight after outplaying eventual finalists Internazionale for long periods of their last-16 tie, while Sporting's European adventure saw them get the better of Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal.

Despite continuing to be desperately short of financial clout in comparison to other leagues, Portuguese football's capacity to produce elite players and make the most of what it can afford in the transfer market enables the elite to continue to punch above their weight. Fans are looking forward to more of the same – or better – in the new campaign where the big three are, on the face of it, all stronger than in the previous year.

Tom Kundert

Plenty to live up to

How can Belgium's top flight follow the most dramatic of conclusions to the league season?

Antwerp hero...Toby Alderweireld after scoring last season's title-winning goal

Change is afoot in Belgian football. Backed by real estate magnate Paul Gheysens, Antwerp enjoyed the most dramatic of coronations last season and will seek to take that momentum into the new season and cement their place among the elite clubs. With 20 clean sheets, the unexpected title win owed plenty to goalkeeper Jean Butez and veteran defender Toby Alderweireld, with striker Vincent Janssen also among the key personnel, but Antwerp will need reinforcements to compete at both the domestic and European level.

On the surface, 2022-23 was a good season for Belgian clubs in Europe: Club Brugge became the third Belgian club (after Anderlecht and Gent) to advance to the knockout stages of the Champions League, Union Saint-Gilloise reached the last eight of the Europa League in impressive fashion, and, with Gent and Anderlecht, Belgium was the best-represented country in the quarter-finals of the Europa Conference League. That statistic, however, is telling of Belgium's weight in Europe. Clubs thrive in the third-tier competition and can no longer compete at a higher level. Will Antwerp even qualify for the Champions League?

The defending champions expect a busy transfer window, with the confirmed arrivals of youngsters George Ilenikhena and Jacob Ondrejka and the battle to re-sign Dutchman Calvin Stengs, but much will depend on how much Gheysens wants to spend on the club in the long run.

The holders' main title challenge should come from former champions Club Brugge, but they are going through a transition under new Norwegian coach Ronny Deila. The West Flemish club is no longer the dominant force that won three titles in a row between 2020 and 2022, and they have been weakened by the departures of Clinton Mata, Noa Lang and Ruud Vormer. They responded by spending in excess of €20 million – more than anyone else in the league – but how this new-look Club Brugge will fare remains to be seen.

Elsewhere, Genk, who arguably played the league's best football last season and were so cruelly denied the title by Alderweireld's last-minute equaliser against them, will be more determined than ever to lift the top prize.

> **Genk, who arguably played the league's best football last season and were so cruelly denied the title by Alderweireld's last-gasp equaliser against them, will be more determined than ever to lift the top prize**

And what about Union, the hottest club in Belgium over the past two seasons? More than ever this will be the season that the Brussels-based club will need to confirm their status as a new force in the domestic game. In the dugout, Alexander Blessin has replaced Karel Geraerts, who departed after contract negotiations stalled. The German coach had a good spell previously with the seaside club KV Oostende, imposing his ideas. His results however were disappointing. It's a gamble by Union, who will be without the departed Teddy Teuma, their captain and mainstay in midfield. Star striker Victor Boniface could also leave the Dudenpark.

Transition year ...Club Brugge coach Ronny Deila

Local rivals Anderlecht, once Belgium's flagship outfit, want to bounce back from their years of irrelevance, boardroom strife and general malaise around the club. To do so, they have signed Kasper Dolberg, once the boy wonder of Danish football. They finished 11th last season, but need a European ticket and UEFA revenue to tame the financial purgatory they find themselves in. The six-team play-offs format – up from four in the last campaign – will offer Anderlecht a chance to dream big. Standard Liege, another fallen giant who have endured years of turbulence, are unlikely to be a contender for the top six.

At the bottom, three clubs can go down in what promises to be another scramble for survival. Vincent Tan-owned KV Kortrijk lack any stability after the reported collapse of a takeover by American investor Kaminski, who had previously flirted with Premier League club Everton; Qatari-owned Eupen have escaped relegation forever, but this season could finally be a step too far. STVV are a question mark and RWD Molenbeek have lost Kylian Hazard to injury for the start of the season. The club from Brussels return to the top flight for the first time in 21 years.

Samindra Kunti

Three-horse race for title

Reigning champions Sparta Prague are expecting strong challenges from Slavia Prague and Viktoria Plzen

Title rivals...Slavia's Matej Jurasek (L) fights for the ball with Sparta's Ladislav Krejci *Credit: Alamy*

There's a crucial question in the air about the Czech Republic's new top-flight season: after Sparta Prague ended their nine-year wait for the league title, is this the start of a new era for the country's most successful club, or was it just a flash in the pan, with Slavia Prague and Viktoria Plzen set to reassert their authority as the teams to beat again?

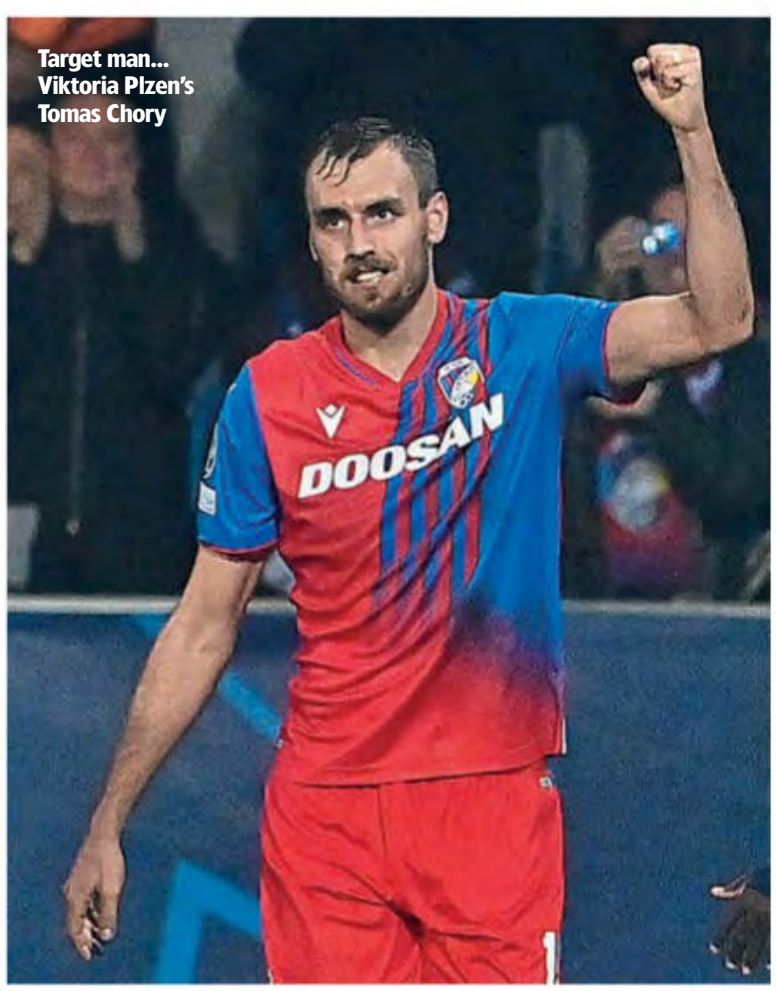
In November, Sparta will celebrate their 130th birthday and would like nothing better than to mark their anniversary season by adding to their collection of trophies. Last season's title was their 13th in the Czech First League, in addition to the 21 that they won before the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, making them the most decorated club in the country by far. Yet it took the arrival of Danish head coach Brian Priske, a title winner in his home country with Midtjylland back in 2019-20, to end the recent dominance of Slavia and Plzen, and the reality is that the 2023-24 season will probably be a three-way battle.

> The reality is that the 2023-24 season will probably be a three-way battle

Slavia, led since the end of 2017 by Jindrich Trpisovsky, have suffered a decline following a dominant period that saw them win three league titles in a row (2019-2021) and produce some impressive performances in Europe, but they will want to reclaim the title and the supremacy in the Czech capital city after matching Sparta's points tally last season.

Viktoria Plzen are the third pretender for the national crown, just as they have been since winning their first-ever league title in 2010-11, before going on to win five more in spite of the Prague giants. They will be led by giant striker Tomas Chory, who stands at 6ft 6in.

As for the outsiders, Bohemians Prague 1905 punched above their weight by finishing fourth last season, and will have to manage balancing European and domestic competitions for at least the first part of the season. The club of Czech legend Antonin Panenka don't seem to have a squad ready for the double commitment but, if their European adventure were to end early, they could repeat their excellent exploits of the past campaign.



Target man... Viktoria Plzen's Tomas Chory

At one stage, Slovan Liberec were the league's upstarts. In 2002 they became the first team from outside Prague to win the title, picking up two more in 2005-06 and 2011-12, but since then they have lived in relative anonymity, overtaken by more successful projects such as FC Slovacko (fifth last season) and Jablonec, who have qualified for Europe four times over the past six seasons. Each will hope to upset the big three, or at least try to emulate Bohemians' success of last season.

The new season could also prove a breakout year for some of the country's young talents. Czech Republic failed to qualify for the knockout stages of the European Under-21 Championship this summer, but they did turn heads by beating Germany in the group stage. According to Czech football expert Giancarlo Falletta, Martin Vitik, who scored the winner against the Germans, is set for a big season at Sparta. The 20-year-old centre-back has already played over 70 times for the club, and has been linked with a move abroad.

Also in the U21 squad was his Sparta team-mate and promising midfielder Adam Karabec, along with 19-year-old winger Matej Jurasek, who contributed six goals and four assists last season on the other side of the city for Slavia.

Emanuele Giulianelli

Rodgers returns

Celtic's title defence will be led by their returning manager Brendan Rodgers

Returning to Celtic ...Brendan Rodgers

How do you improve on a near-perfect season? That's the question for Celtic after the 2022-23 campaign in which they completed an eighth domestic treble and collected 99 Premiership points.

Rather than being allowed to savour his achievements, manager Ange Postecoglou was headhunted by Tottenham Hotspur, and Celtic brought Brendan Rodgers back to his first love in the east end of Glasgow.

His second appointment at the club was greeted with a radically more muted turnout than the first, when 13,000 fans came to the former Liverpool manager's unveiling in 2016. The 50-year-old Northern Irishman will have to win over the fans that were hurt by his departure for Leicester City in February 2019.

The fact Rodgers had two trebles of his own, including the unbeaten "Invincibles" of 2016-17, fuelled the disbelief that he would be lured back by the English Premier League. However, Rodgers had a very good track record at Leicester, with two fifth-place finishes, an FA Cup win and a spot in the the last four of the Europa Conference League.

> "I won seven trophies out of seven and wanted to come back to Celtic and finish the work I started. I'm a better manager now"
>
> Brendan Rodgers

As Rodgers told the media at his second Celtic unveiling, he is a better manager now. He was sacked in March before Leicester's relegation, which meant he was available to replace Postecoglou. The message was actually aimed at the supporters, and most are definitely on board with Rodgers' return.

"What I regret is the hurt," said Rodgers. "I knew people were hurt. It was a sad moment. I had family who were shocked but that's the decisions you make as a professional. I am sure Virgil van Dijk didn't apologise when he left, or Kieran Tierney, or Henrik Larsson.

"I won seven trophies out of seven and wanted to come back to Celtic and finish the work I started. I'm a better manager now and hardly think what I did at Leicester was mediocre.

"I love the club. Rarely do you get a job in management, that things are in good shape but Ange did a fantastic job. He will have loved his time here and won't find a better set of supporters. I had lunch with Callum McGregor and that convinced me to come back."

But it is not just English clubs that covet Celtic's assets. Portuguese winger Jota, who scored 15 goals, was bought by Saudi side Al Ittihad for £25 million in July, equalling the record sale of Tierney to Arsenal in 2019.

Celtic reinvested the Jota cash into enhanced contracts for those who stayed. Club captain McGregor's five years and Japan forwards, Kyogo Furuhashi (34 goals last term) and Daizen Maeda, new deals until 2027, announced days later.

On the other side of Glasgow, Rangers have lost key players who took the club to the Europa League final in 2022, and manager Michael Beale knows that achievement did not protect Giovanni van Bronckhorst from being sacked. With just one title in 12 years, Ibrox is thin on patience.

Eyeing an England recall...Rangers' new goalkeeper Jack Butland

Goalkeeper Allan McGregor, winger Ryan Kent and prolific Colombian striker Alfredo Morelos have all left the club. Six signings, led by England goalkeeper Jack Butland from Crystal Palace to fill the shoes of talismanic McGregor, have been made so far. Front men Cyriel Dessers (Cremonese), Abdallah Sima (Brighton) and Sam Lammers (Atalanta), full-back Dujon Sterling (Chelsea) and midfielder Kieran Dowell (Norwich City) are the other new boys.

"I have some big goalkeepers to follow," said Butland, 30. "Hopefully I can follow in Allan's footsteps. It is a great feeling to be wanted. I have not been able to show [England manager] Gareth Southgate for a few years what I can do, but that is a target for me."

Such was Aberdeen's resurgence under caretaker coach Barry Robson, who led the team to third, he was given the job full-time. Defeating Rangers, in his home city, was a huge coup for the former Scotland player and Robson has bought Liverpool midfielder Leighton Clarkson, who shone on loan at Pittodrie last season.

Hearts are also in the care of a rookie manager, former Scotland striker Steven Naismith, while Hibernian hope Adam Le Fondre (Sydney FC) will replace the goals of Scotland striker Kevin Nisbet (sold to Millwall for £2m).

Second-tier champions Dundee return to the top flight right away at the expense of their neighbours Dundee United. Schadenfreude in the City of Discovery, but awful for United on the 40th anniversary of their 1983 title.

Phil Gordon

Swiss switch

A change of format, three new clubs – but the same champions?

Title favourites... Young Boys have won five of the last six Swiss titles

The new Swiss Super League season begins with Young Boys favourites to continue their recent dominance, another new manager at Basel, a new enlarged format and, for the first time in 17 seasons, without the chaos of Sion.

The league has been enlarged from ten to 12 clubs and adopted what has locally been dubbed "the Scottish model". In the regular season, the teams will play each other three times and will then be split into two groups – the "Championship Group" for the top six and "Relegation Group" for the bottom six; in both cases teams play once more against every other team within their group. This ensures 38 rounds of matches and means teams will face direct rivals in their last few games.

Two key points are that teams will carry their full points total into the second stage (unlike, for example, in the Austrian Bundesliga where points totals are halved) and, crucially, there will not be a play-off for the title. This had been contemplated following a number of one-horse races in the last few seasons but the Swiss Football League's members voted against the idea under pressure from the supporters.

> The league has been enlarged from ten to 12 clubs and adopted what has locally been dubbed "the Scottish model"

Young Boys remain favourites to retain their title which they claimed with five games to spare last season, eventually finishing 16 points clear of Servette to make it five championships in the last six seasons. They have kept the core of the squad together, including manager Raphael Wicky, although central defender Cedric Zesiger has been sold to Wolfsburg.

Servette could offer a threat providing they can overcome the departure of manager Alain Geiger, who took the Geneva club from the second division to runners-up during five seasons in charge and has been replaced by Rene Weiler, a former Servette player during the 1990s. Having overcome the financial problems that saw the club declare bankruptcy in 2005 and spend several seasons in the second tier, Servette now have an impressive youth set-up that has produced players such as Denis Zakaria and Kevin Mbabu.

The latest crop includes winger Tiemoko Ouattara, midfielders Sidiki Camara, Adriatik Salihi and Jarell Simo, and defender Leart Zuka. "When you don't have much money, you must work with the young players," said Weiler, recognising their potential. "Servette has some very good talents, and I want to help them take the next step and bring them into the professional squad."

Meanwhile, Lugano and Luzern remain dark horses. Lugano, third last season, won the Swiss Cup in 2022, have qualified for Europe twice since Chicago Fire owner Joe Mansueto bought the club in 2021, and are planning to build a new stadium for 2026. Luzern remain under the leadership of manager Mario Frick, the Liechtenstein national team record goalscorer, who saved them from relegation two seasons ago and led them to fourth last season.

Basel's new boss ...Timo Schultz

Basel, fifth last season and Europa Conference League semi-finalists, start under yet another new coach, Timo Schultz, who becomes the eighth manager to occupy the hot seat since their run of nine successive titles ended in 2017. The 45-year-old German only has 18 months of senior coaching experience, all with St Pauli in the German second tier.

The club have sold 20-year-old French midfielder Andy Diouf to Lens, a move that has boosted their finances but left a big hole in the team. Diouf played a key role last season when he was on loan from Rennes and impressed enough for Basel to exercise an option to buy him for €5 million. However, weeks later Diouf joined Lens in a €15m deal, a handy profit for Basel.

Three teams have been promoted from the Swiss Challenge League – Yverdon Sport, back for the first time since 2005-06 and now under American owner Jamie Welch, Jim Radcliffe's INEOS-backed Lausanne-Sport, and their neighbours Stade Lausanne Ouchy.

The latter are making their top-flight debut after overcoming Sion in a promotion-relegation play-off. Sion, under volatile president Christian Constantin, had enjoyed a run of 17 seasons in the first division, and there was rarely a dull moment. They employed 36 different coaches during that period, several of them more than once, and the appointments even included Constantin himself as caretaker on four different occasions.

Brian Homewood

Nine years of hurt

Patience is running out for Fenerbahce's club president as the Yellow Canaries await their first title since 2014

No figure in the Turkish game is under more pressure on the eve of the new season than Fenerbahce president Ali Koc, who desperately needs silverware to silence his many critics at the Sukru Saracoglu Stadium.

Since Koc replaced the long-serving Aziz Yildirim in the executive hot-seat five years ago, the Yellow Canaries, Turkish league winners on no fewer than 28 occasions, have had to live on a diet of championship crumbs and, with no titles in nine long years, the patience of supporters is wearing decidedly thin.

The Fenerbahce faithful had assumed that Koc, a scion of the richest family in the country, would swiftly kick-start a magnificent new era for the team in yellow and navy stripes. Instead, underachievement has proved the norm. Championship glory is what the supporters crave. A pair of runners-up spots – trailing behind Trabzonspor in 2021-22 and arch-rivals Galatasaray last term – does not even begin to satisfy the hunger pains.

Koc certainly has not been passive in his attempts to reach the Promised Land. During the five years of his presidency, he has brought in some 80 new players and employed nine different coaches.

Not that the bright red hue of the club's accounts appears to be dampening Koc's enthusiasm for the challenge. He has been as keen as ever to make flagship signings, and in acquiring Inter's out-of-contract veteran striker Edin Dzeko, defender Alexander Djiku (free transfer from Strasbourg) and, most eye-catchingly of all, Serbia superstar Dusan Tadic, also on a free from Ajax, he has certainly done that.

Bosnian Dzeko will take the place of the Ecuadorian Enner Valencia, the Super Lig top goalscorer last season, who is now with Internacional in Brazil. Fener also recruited the English winger Ryan Kent, previously with Rangers, and Brazilian centre-backs Gustavo Henrique and Rodrigo Becao from Flamengo and Udinese respectively. The Fenerbahce powers-that-be had also hoped to keep teen sensation midfielder Arda Guler, 18, on board for another season, but the much-coveted left-footer joined Real Madrid in a €20m deal – with Tadic now likely to fill that void.

Under pressure ...Fenerbahce president Ali Koc

This season, Fenerbahce will have a familiar face at the coaching controls in the shape of Ismail Kartal, back for a third spell in the technical area. Previously in charge in 2014-15 and the second-half of the 2021-22 campaign, the 62-year-old has two main priorities: one, end the chaos in team selection and settle on a first XI in which players are deployed in their best positions; two, address Fenerbahce's appalling recent record in "Big Three" Istanbul derbies. In the last five years, the Yellow Canaries have managed only three wins in 20 matches v Galatasaray and Besiktas.

> In the last five years, the Yellow Canaries have managed only three wins in 20 matches v Galatasaray and Besiktas

Reigning champions Galatasaray will continue to rely heavily on the "Golden Triangle" comprising the midfield duo of Kerem Akturkoglu and Nicolo Zaniolo, and prolific Argentine striker Mauro Icardi. The latter, who piled up 22 league goals in 2022-23, is clearly a man for the big domestic occasion, on the scoresheet in every Istanbul derby that he appeared in last season. In further good news for the Lions, Icardi has just converted a loan deal with Galatasaray into a permanent arrangement. The cost? A €10m payment to Paris Saint-Germain.

Galatasaray star ...Nicolo Zaniolo

Galatasaray coach Okan Buruk has no need to change his winning formula: the freedom granted to his attacking-third heavyweights, solid organisation and the indomitable sprit running through the side. As long as they do not succumb to self-satisfaction, back-to-back championships are a distinct possibility. In Icardi, Zaniolo, Belgian second-striker Dries Mertens, engine-room battler Lucas Torreira and Portuguese central midfielder Sergio Oliveira, the champions boast the best foreign legion in the country.

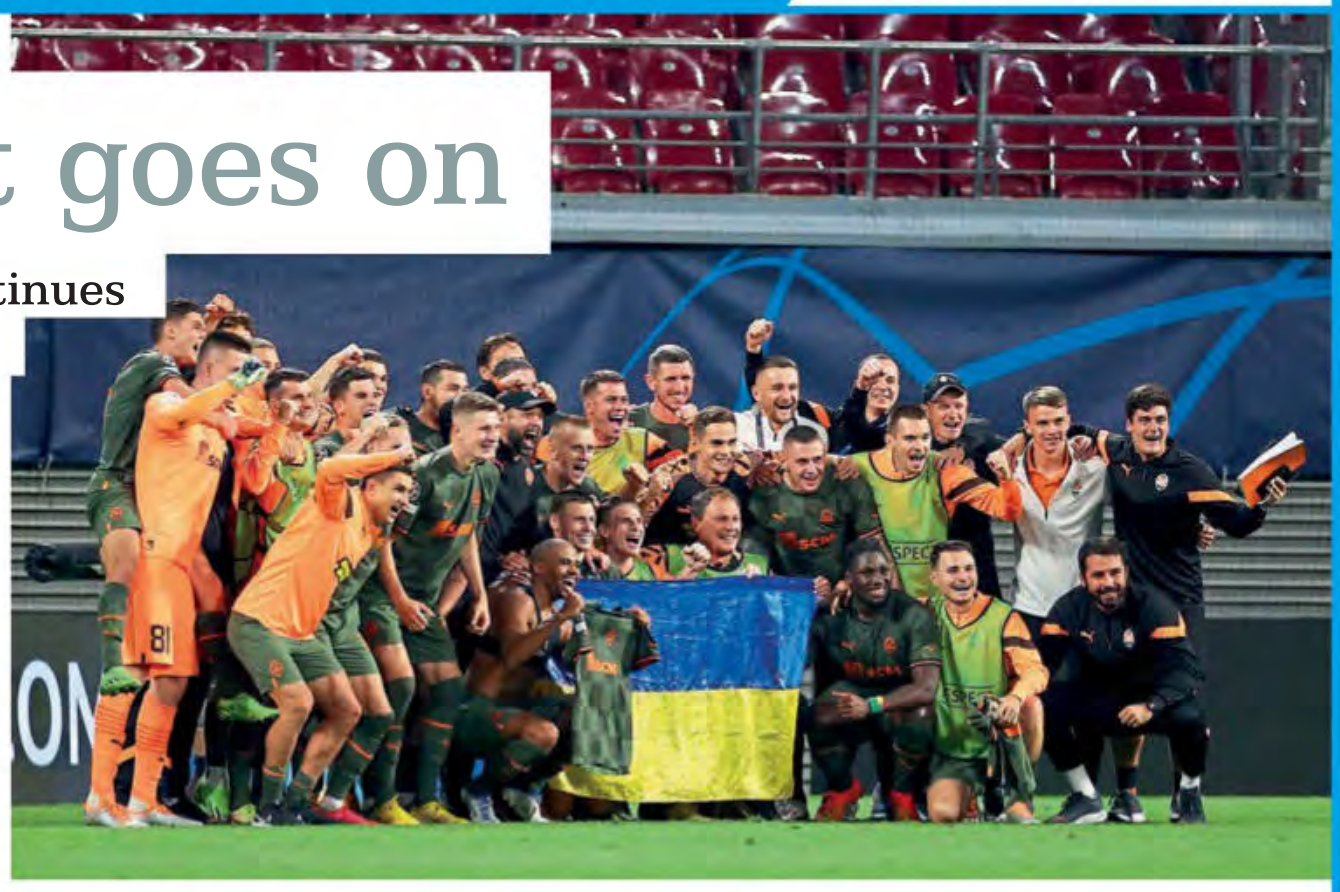
Besiktas, shrewdly marshalled by the ever-passionate 71-year-old Senol Gunes, should at least achieve another top-three berth and could rise even higher if they can eradicate a tendency for careless draws.

Expect a great deal of attention on the upwardly mobile Adana Demirspor too, where former Ajax and Netherlands striker Patrick Kluivert will be getting to grips with his first taste of club management.

Nick Bidwell

The fight goes on

Football in Ukraine continues in the face of adversity



Flying the flag... Shakhtar Donetsk impressed in 2022-23

In the last championship of the Ukrainian Premier League, held in the conditions of full-scale aggression of Russia, the question was not so much about football but about human survival.

In the new season, economic priorities will take over for Ukrainian clubs, although FIFA has not helped in this regard with the governing body allowing players and coaches to suspend their contracts shortly after the invasion in 2022. Many foreign players took up this option, leaving their clubs on free transfers, leading to a huge loss of transfer income and a depletion of clubs' incomes.

Shakhtar Donetsk, who traditionally relied on foreign players, particularly from Brazil, suffered the most in this regard: after FIFA's decision, they lost 14 major foreign players and their entire coaching staff, headed by Italian coach Roberto De Zerbi.

Given the circumstances, Shakhtar's 2022-23 title victory was a remarkable achievement, but they continue to be challenged. FIFA's rule, which was supposed to end at the end of June this year, has been extended for another season, with foreign players and coaches continuing to take advantage.

> **Given the circumstances, Shakhtar's 2022-23 title victory was a remarkable achievement, but they continue to be challenged**

"We continue to look forward to ongoing consultations between the ECA [European Club Association] and FIFA to develop a financial solution regarding the losses of Shakhtar and other Ukrainian clubs," announced Shakhtar CEO Serhii Palkin. "We hope that we will be able to achieve a positive result that will be fair and will help us recover at least part of the €80m that we may lose as part of this ongoing process."

Now the focus is on the 24-year-old winger Manor Solomon. Following FIFA's decision, he suspended his contract with the Donetsk club last year and signed a loan agreement with Fulham. The Israeli should, then, have returned this summer, but FIFA's ruling has allowed him to sign for Tottenham Hotspur on a free transfer.

"We paid a lot of money for him, and Tottenham get him for free in the end?" Palkin said. "We are confident that [the] Tottenham management understands that Shakhtar has invested significant funds in the transfer of Solomon, which our club in our difficult situation simply cannot afford to lose."

According to *The Guardian*, a compensation package was agreed between the two clubs, but the majority of it will be paid by FIFA.

Off the pitch, Shakhtar also lost successful head coach Igor Jovicevic to the Saudi Pro League. In just a year in the job, the charismatic Croat built a highly efficient title-winning team, which impressed in the Champions League group stage. He will be replaced by Dutchman Patrick van Leeuwen, who guided Zorya Luhansk to third and led Shakhtar's academy from 2006 to 2013.

Dynamo Kyiv, meanwhile, have placed their faith in experience, with 78-year-old Romanian veteran Mircea Lucescu remaining in charge despite leading last season's title favourites to a disappointing fourth place. This decision of the club owner Ihor Surkis was negatively perceived by some supporters, although they were more welcoming towards the returning Andriy Yarmolenko. The 33-year-old captain of Ukraine has spent the last six seasons abroad, including four with West Ham United sandwiched between spells at Broussia Dortmund in Germany and Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates.

Kyiv return... Ukraine legend Andriy Yarmolenko

"I returned because I want to be in my homeland at the most difficult moment in its history," he said. "I cannot express in words how grateful I am to our soldiers and officers. Without them, there would be no Ukrainian football at all."

The league season began on July 29, with the Ukrainian Cup, which was not held last season, returning on August 16.

So far, the question of whether spectators will be allowed at matches and in what quantity remains open.

"At the initiative and at the request of the clubs, the UAF [Ukrainian Football Association] is now engaged in a dialogue with the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine and regional military administrations to implement the possibility of limited admission of fans to the stands," said UAF president Andriy Pavelko.

"Theatres, cinema and concert halls work in conditions of a full-scale war. Why can't a limited number of spectators, with strict adherence to the relevant security protocol, attend football matches?"

Fans will only be able to attend matches at appropriate stadiums, in particular those with a sufficient number of bomb shelters in place, and only with the permission of the relevant regional military administration and police officers.

Whatever is decided, Pavelko is convinced: "The return of fans to the stands of stadiums will give our clubs and all Ukrainian football a sense of support both in social and economic terms. This is very, very important, because the war in Ukraine is still going on."

Oleg Zadernovsky

VIVE LA RÉVOLUTION

Change continues apace at Paris Saint-Germain

Words: Colin Millar

New era...Nasser Al Khelaifi with PSG's new head coach Luis Enrique

PSG talisman... Kylian Mbappe

Old and new...PSG have rebranded under QSI

In the summer of 2021, Paris Saint-Germain sent a remarkable statement of intent in the transfer market. They poached Lionel Messi and Sergio Ramos, the outgoing captains of Barcelona and Real Madrid, signed Italy's European Championship-winning goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma from Milan, and Liverpool midfielder Georginio Wijnaldum – all free agents.

Fast-forward two years: Messi and Ramos have both departed the club at the end of their contracts having failed to find their best form, while Wijnaldum is also set to leave permanently following a year on loan at Roma. Mauricio Pochettino and his successor Christophe Galtier have also both moved on in that timeframe, as the club once more seek a new direction. Both managers secured the Ligue 1 title, but both did so in underwhelming circumstances, amid the backdrop of domestic cup failures and tame Champions League exits at the last-16 stage.

The new man in the dugout, former Roma, Barcelona and Spain coach Luis Enrique has more silverware to his name than both of his predecessors put together, most notably winning the treble with Barca in 2014-15. That the Spaniard will be expected to win Ligue 1 can be taken for granted – PSG have won nine Ligue 1 titles since 2012 – but performances on the European stage is where he and the club will be judged.

With no Qatari wealth to bankroll them, PSG's domestic rivals have continued to struggle financially. French clubs previously hoped they would be revitalised by an unprecedented TV rights deal, backed by *Mediapro* and *beIN Sport* and worth more than €1.15 billion per year – the second largest in Europe. That fell through in late 2020, leaving many top-flight clubs in a perilous situation. The economic dominance of PSG was reflected in their wage bill, prior to their 2021 signings, eclipsing the combined total of 14 of their 19 league rivals.

> There was an awareness from Al Khelaifi's QSI organisation that the city's glitz and glamour would help it attract the world's best players. In 2013, the club's badge was tweaked to enlarge the word "Paris" along the top of the crest

Lille's league title in 2021 and Lens amassing a points tally of 84 – just one shy of PSG – last season may give an illusion of competitiveness but both the fans and ownership of the French capital club are aware that the league title is no longer the barometer for success. They have never won the Champions League, but the most worrying trend is that they have fallen at the round-of-16 stage in five of the past seven seasons – having reached the quarter-finals in four successive campaigns prior to that. When faced with clubs of a similar financial standing, they have continually fallen short. That trend has become more pronounced in recent seasons.

Last year, PSG president Nasser Al Khelaifi made the decision to move into "phase two" of his ownership of the club. The first decade had been marked by establishing themselves as France's premier team and a regular in the Champions League knockout stages. This was largely propelled by a series of high-profile signings. The 2017 arrivals of Kylian Mbappe and Neymar remain football's highest-ever transfer fees, after eye-catching payments to secure the signatures of Angel Di Maria, Edinson Cavani, David Luiz and Thiago Silva among others.

Paris views itself as the fashion capital of Europe; its monument-lined boulevards, museums, classical bistros, and boutiques place it among the most desirable locations. There was an awareness from Al Khelaifi's Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) organisation that the city's glitz and glamour would help it attract the world's best players. In 2013, the club's badge was tweaked to enlarge the word "Paris" along the top of the crest and move the "Saint-Germain" lettering to the base. Centred by the unmistakable Eiffel Tower, the badge readjustment strengthened the club's branding, which was viewed as

a long-term issue. Increasingly, the club is referred to as "Paris" with the "Saint-Germain" dropped. This is despite potential confusion with Ligue 2 club Paris FC, while Red Star FC remain the city's longest-running professional club.

But the French capital is a city of multiple shades and, despite its clubs' peculiar lack of historical success, the Parisian suburbs have a remarkable rate of producing top-class players. The current metro area population stands at 11.2 million – almost a million more than the entire population of Portugal. Its socioeconomic conditions are conducive to producing talented footballers and Paris-born stars have provided the backbone of the France international ranks, who have the greatest depth of any national side.

Premier League defensive stars Ibrahima Konate and William Saliba were both born in the city's boundaries, as was in-demand Barcelona defender Jules Kounde. The midfield duo that propelled the 2018 World Cup success, N'Golo Kante and Paul Pogba, were each from the city. Christopher Nkunku and Randal Kolo Muani, France's most exciting attacking talents at the moment, are Parisian. Seko Fofana, the midfield kingpin in Lens' remarkable title push, is among a host of Paris-born players that have shone at PSG's Ligue 1 rivals; Monaco duo Youssouf Fofana and Axel Disasi also fall into that bracket.

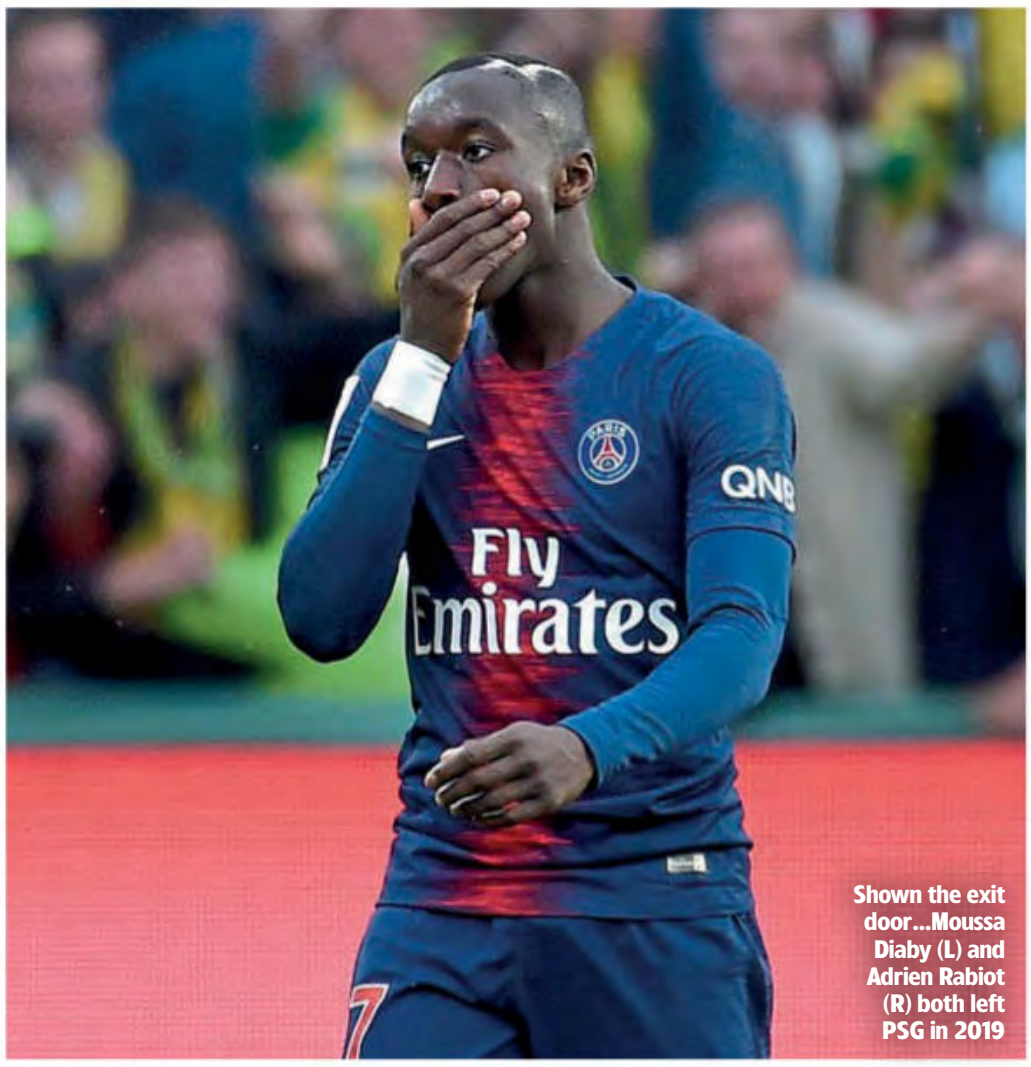
Made in Paris... Kingsley Coman celebrates scoring against PSG in the 2020 Champions League final

The sense that PSG are missing out on securing their signatures at youth level is acute. Had the club made a concentrated effort to build a team solely of local-born players, they would arguably have dominated domestic football while having an identity that resonated with their vocal and passionate fanbase. It would all of course be headed by superstar striker Mbappe – who slipped through PSG's youth recruitment process, instead developing at Monaco.

> While Al Khelaifi and his ownership group instantly recognised the commercial potential of the club, they misjudged the potential of the city's talent base

Mbappe was signed by Monaco back in 2013 and while there is an acknowledgement that Al Khelaifi had not been in situ at the club for a sufficient period to overhaul the club's youth recruitment and development, there are no shortage of signs that the club have not learned their lessons since. PSG's connection with their own city was diminished by allowing midfield star Adrien Rabiot to join Juventus in 2019, while his France midfield team-mate Matteo Guendouzi spent nine years in PSG's youth system before moving to Lorient the year after Mbappe's move to Monaco.

PSG sold winger Moussa Diaby, then still a teenager, to Bayer Leverkusen after just one season in their first-team squad. He has blossomed into one of Europe's most talented attackers and is also now a part of Didier Deschamps' international ranks. Diaby's path to regular first-team football was blocked by the glitzy arrivals of Neymar and others – yet another indication that the club made a mistake in judging the talent of their own emerging players. That was brutally true in the case of Kingsley Coman, who ironically provided the goal that



Shown the exit door...Moussa Diaby (L) and Adrien Rabiot (R) both left PSG in 2019

defeated PSG in their only Champions League final appearance. Bayern Munich star Coman – who was also named Man of the Match in that 2020 final and netted again against *Les Parisiens* in last season's last 16 – was sold by PSG, the club of his home city, in 2014 after just four appearances.

While Al Khelaifi and his ownership group instantly recognised the commercial potential of the club, they misjudged the potential of the city's talent base and the significance of forging a strong bond between players and fanbase. In recent seasons, Messi and Neymar were among the players booed by PSG's match-going supporters. Fans had grown dissatisfied with many of the stars, who they perceived to take liberties at the Parc des Princes. Perhaps this was a natural conclusion of their lucrative wage packets and an absence of continued sporting jeopardy. Notably, local star Mbappe was often spared their ire.

PSG went into this summer comfortable in the knowledge that Messi and Ramos would leave, while also being open to offers for Neymar. In Al Khelaifi's own words, the emphasis was to move away from a "bling-bling" culture and towards a sustainable financial project, based on identifying, recruiting and developing French talents. An indication that the squad restructuring process was underway was shown by their Champions League clash at Bayern Munich in March ending with 17-year-old duo El Chadaille Bitshiabu and Warren Zaire-Emery – both born in the Parisian suburbs – on the pitch.

Back in Paris... Nordi Mukiele

Last summer saw the arrival of another local boy, Nordi Mukiele, from RB Leipzig – an indication of their long-term vision. PSG are redirecting funds away from their wage bill and towards spending larger fees on younger stars that they believe can represent the club for the next decade or so. This approach will be complemented by their new state-of-the-art training facility in Poissy, Paris, which will open this year and focus on developing the city's best young talent.

In September 2022, PSG were among ten clubs participating in 2021-22 UEFA club competition that were fined for breaching UEFA's Financial Fair Play (FFP) rules, leading to a whopping €65m fine – of which €10m was paid immediately and the remaining €55m suspended. The need for reducing the wage bill was significant; in addition to the suspended fine, they may have been unable to register any new players to their European squad for the upcoming season and a possible reduction in the size of their registered squad for European competition dropping from 25 to 23. If non-compliance with "break-even" rules – where clubs must balance their books over the course of three years – continued, the club even risked exclusion from continental tournaments entirely, although that would be over a longer timeframe.

We can expect to see a different version of PSG from this season, not only on the pitch but off it too, as they continue their attempts to own their stadium. The Parc des Princes is currently run by the city's council and the club's long-term future is unclear, believing they have outgrown its 47,929 capacity and insisting that modernisation is required. The "bling-bling'" culture in the French capital is over and a new approach is well underway.

THE RISE OF THE VIKINGS

Erling Haaland and Martin Odegaard are the latest in a long line of Norwegians to impress in the Premier League

Words: Sean Cole

Two of the Premier League's finest talents are Norwegian. Last season, the relentless Erling Haaland scored a record 36 goals to fire Manchester City to the title ahead of Arsenal, whose surprise challenge was led by Martin Odegaard, the captain and heartbeat of an emerging force.

Both are global superstars with the media profile to match their outstanding ability. While typically humble and hard-working – attributes often possessed by Scandinavian footballers – few, if any, of their fellow countrymen have achieved such an exalted status on or off the pitch.

Norway's early Premier League pioneers delivered plenty of industry, professionalism and success, yet it was never accompanied by the same intoxicating sense of glamour. Somehow, Haaland and Odegaard have managed to combine it all. They are consummate team players yet also incredibly gifted individuals. While following in the previous generation's footsteps, they look set to go further than any of them.

In 1992, the Premier League was formed and the course of English

Leading lights ...Odegaard and Haaland celebrate a goal for Norway

football changed forever. Notions of sport, entertainment and business became more closely entwined than ever before, attracting a global audience of unprecedented size.

Previously, there was just a smattering of foreign players, even at the top level. Horizons were narrower, and attitudes more insular. A parochial approach to recruitment dominated where the familiar triumphed over the exotic. Outside of the other home nations and Ireland, the first real wave of imports came from Scandinavia, and Norway in particular, during the early 1990s.

Gunnar Halle was one of the earliest arrivals, joining Oldham Athletic from Lillestrom for £280,000 in 1991. "Joe Royle was the manager and, obviously, he was looking for a right-back at the time," he recalls. "He had played with Age Hareide and they were friends. They spoke together and he mentioned me. After a trial, I signed for them. That was the first step."

After winning promotion with Oldham, Halle became the first Norwegian to play, and then score, in the Premier League during its debut season. Alongside the likes of Henning Berg and Stig Inge Bjornebye, who would also become recognisable stalwarts, he was one of eight Norwegian players to feature that season, twice the number from the Netherlands. In contrast, France had a single representative – Eric Cantona. There were no Italians or Portuguese.

> "At this rate…the traditional giant Christmas tree from Oslo could be replaced as the best export to England from Norway"
>
> *World Soccer* article from 1993

It was a trend observed in these very pages. "Viking invasion continues," ran a headline in the March 1993 edition of *World Soccer*.

"The Scandinavian invasion of English soccer has gathered pace in recent months, with the arrival of seven new players from Nordic countries bringing the total to 17 in the Premier League," stated John Kelly in the article. "At this rate...the traditional giant Christmas tree from Oslo could be replaced as the best export to England from Norway."

Like many of his compatriots, Halle had watched English football on TV growing up and knew what to expect. "It's high intensity. The tempo and the aggression are there. Maybe that was higher than I was used to in Norway, but I think I adapted to it quite quickly. I could run and sprint. I settled in quite well."

Trailblazers...Leeds' Gunnar Halle competes for the ball with Manchester United's Ole Gunnar Solskjaer

Inspired by early trailblazers like Halle, the number of Norwegian players in the Premier League broadly continued to rise across subsequent years, peaking at 22 in the 1997-98 and 1999-2000 seasons. Remarkably, on both occasions, Norway was the fourth-best represented country in the whole division, even ahead of Wales and Northern Ireland.

Several factors fuelled this influx. Norwegians had a certain resilience, a toughness, both mental and physical, that recruiters admired. Plus, as Kelly noted, they came at a good price; Norwegian players were: "relatively inexpensive considering the inflated transfer values in the English game at present, and seem to adapt easily to the English lifestyle," he said.

Halle, who made 184 Premier League appearances across spells at Oldham, Leeds United and Bradford City, agrees. "Managers saw that we could easily adapt to the way of playing in England – the tempo, the passion and everything like that – and also that we could settle in quite well outside of football; we more or less knew the language so that wasn't a big thing.

"I think there were many reasons why managers and clubs wanted players from Norway."

Their abilities were highlighted by the success of the national team under the eccentric Egil Olsen. After a 56-year

Scouted...Oyvind Leonhardsen and Lars Bohinen celebrate Norway's win over England in 1993

absence, they impressively reached the 1994 World Cup finals by finishing top of their qualifying group, ahead of the Netherlands and England.

Along the way, Norway outclassed Graham Taylor's side to win 2-0 in Oslo, with midfielders Oyvind Leonhardsen and Lars Bohinen on the scoresheet. Exposed to a wider audience, both were soon picked up by English clubs, Wimbledon and Nottingham Forest respectively, for relatively small fees and went on to enjoy long careers in the Premier League.

More Norwegians would join them as a virtuous circle developed. Many of these new signings made a seamless transition, paving the way for others. Claus Lundekvam, Egil Ostenstad and Tore Andre Flo were among several to arrive direct from Norway for less than £1 million. Nobody wanted to risk missing out on a potential bargain.

Halle is proud to have helped set a trend. "I can have a smile on my face when I think back on that. It's nice to be part of the development of the Premier League, from the players who were there at the beginning all the way through to now. I felt that I did well and maybe that made some other clubs and managers want Norwegian players. I have a good feeling about that."

Norwegian recruits were often praised for their temperament, their willingness to learn and to seize their opportunity. Most seemed to be diligent, durable and low maintenance. They knew how to speak English and weren't remotely fazed by the cold, wet weather. Significantly, Olsen had already shown them how to play direct, high-tempo football to great effect.

"You heard what managers said about Norwegian players – their mentality, their fitness. They adapt quite easily to the way of playing, and also living, over there. More and more Norwegians came because we did well with the national team. When we beat England at home in a qualifying game in 1993, all the clubs in England saw that. They valued the players more when we got results against their own!" laughs Halle.

"We had a certain way of playing. When we played well, like the game against England, it wasn't only long balls. We mixed it up well. I think we were a team. We didn't have any superstars, so we were working really hard for each other. Olsen made us believe that we could beat anybody."

They may not have inspired the same excitement as a glitzy South American signing, but Norwegians were usually a much safer bet – easier to track in their domestic league, more affordable, and faced with fewer cultural barriers to success. In total, 74 have played in the Premier League, and 21 of them have made at least 100 appearances in the competition. Odegaard should join that list soon.

Norwegians were quick to make their presence felt. Henning Berg was the first player to win the Premier League title with two different clubs – Blackburn Rovers and Manchester United. Alongside Ronny Johnsen and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, he was one of three Norwegians in the historic treble-winning side of 1999.

That incredible achievement came just a year after another, Norway's greatest moment on the international stage. At their second consecutive World Cup, and only their third overall, the underdogs qualified from Group A by dramatically coming from behind to beat reigning champions Brazil 2-1 in the Stade Velodrome.

Despite being knocked out by Italy in the last 16, that famous result lives on. It was the culmination of an unforgettable rise to prominence for a modest team, and nation, that briefly had football's traditional powerhouses on the run. Limited resources and a population of just four million couldn't hold them back. They had nothing to fear and reached as high as second in the FIFA world rankings.

Tore Andre Flo...the striker arrived at Chelsea in 1997

Eye-catching...Ronny Johnsen and Henning Berg celebrate after beating Brazil 2-1 at France '98

"We had more players going abroad and playing in good clubs. I think that was important because every week we were playing at a higher standard than maybe we did in Norway," says Halle, who earned 64 international caps. "We got results and I think that meant we got more respect when we played in different countries. It was growing and that gave us confidence."

Norway's invasion of English football reflected the national team's progress and aided their cause too. Half of their squad for the 1998 World Cup represented Premier League clubs. A further four previously had done, or subsequently would do, the same.

Then the decline set in. Gradual at first, it soon accelerated. By the 2010-11 season, Norway had dropped out of the top 25 nations providing Premier League players for the first time since the competition started, lagging behind the likes of Ghana, Serbia and Mexico. Paraguay and DR Congo matched their four representatives.

> "More and more Norwegians came because we did well with the national team – when we beat England at home in a qualifying game in 1993"
>
> **Gunnar Halle**

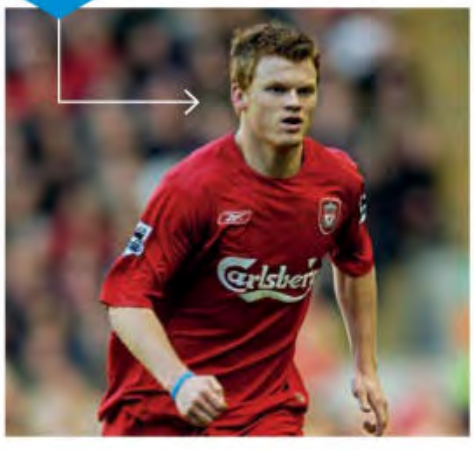
Technological change, globalised recruitment and spiralling broadcast deals opened up new possibilities to the Premier League, which had become arguably the strongest in the world. Foreign players outnumbered English ones by a significant margin and came from an ever more diverse range of countries. With their newfound wealth, clubs explored different territories. Many

Premier League Norwegians

1 Ole Gunnar SOLSKJAER

The Premier League's highest-scoring Norwegian with 91 goals for Manchester United.

2 John Arne RIISE



Explosive left-back with a rocket shot and over 300 Premier League appearances to his name.

3 Morten Gamst PEDERSEN

Former Blackburn Rovers winger with a spectacular left foot and 34 goals, along with 39 assists.

stopped shopping in Norway altogether. Standards had risen and fewer of their players came up to scratch.

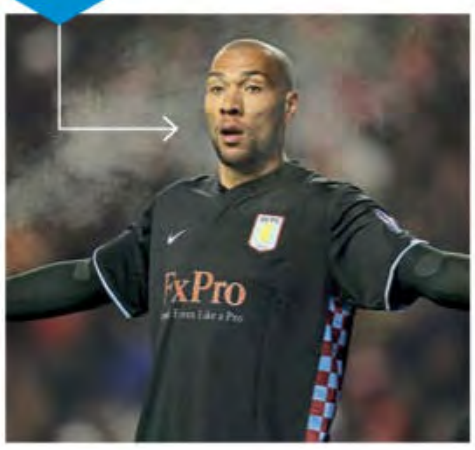
Trends come and go. Evolution is constant. Access to the Norwegian market once gave Premier League clubs an edge that they no longer need.

Declining numbers... Brede Hangeland (L) and Morten Gamst Pedersen (R) were among the four Norwegians in the Premier League by the 2010-11 season

Increasingly, only the very best players – like Haaland and Odegaard – will do. Both are the sons of former footballers and signed for big fees after gaining plenty of experience outside their homeland. They are an evocative link to the past, when Norway was on the rise, and a reminder of how much has changed.

"It's good for them and for Norway – not only the football side but the whole country – when they're doing well," says Halle. "Everybody knows who they are and what they're doing. That's something special. You wouldn't think that we'd have two of the best players in the Premier League, with all the media hype they get. Young players in Norway see that they're doing well and they want to do the same thing."

4 John CAREW



Destructive striker for Aston Villa after a nomadic career across Europe. Also had a brief loan spell at Stoke City.

5 Claus LUNDEKVAM

Long-serving Southampton centre-back. Only Riise played more Premier League games.

6 Henning BERG

Title-winning defender with both Blackburn Rovers and Manchester United.

6 OF THE BEST

Premier League Norwegians

SPECIAL TRIBUTE

BERLUSCONI'S BILLIONS

How the former owner of Milan changed the face of Italian football forever

Words: Paddy Agnew

The death of 86-year-old Silvio Berlusconi, who died in Milan on June 12 from a leukaemia-related illness, was an epoch-marking event that profoundly shook not just Italian football fans but the entire country.

The media tycoon and former Prime Minister was, of course, best known to football fans all around the world as the owner of and inspiration behind the brilliant Milan side of the late 1980s/early '90s. For the last 30 years since his entry into politics in 1994, Berlusconi inevitably devoted less time to football, concentrating rather on his often bitterly controversial political career.

Before that, however, he had masterminded a truly golden era for Milan which, in just six years, saw the great club win three European Cups/Champions Leagues (1989, 1990, 1994), two Intercontinental Cups (1989, 1990) and four Serie A titles (1988, 1992, 1993, 1994) in a magical moment when many considered Milan to be the strongest club team in world football.

Whatever about Berlusconi's scandal-plagued public life, many football critics would probably agree that he was an innovative and farsighted club owner and one whose dynamic inspiration and cash (of course) created one of the greatest club sides of all time. Whilst Berlusconi remained, technically, the boss at Milan for another 20 years during which the club won two more Champions League trophies (2003, 2007) and four more Serie A titles (1996, 1999, 2004, 2011), nothing remotely matched the spectacular success of his early years in charge.

By the time he came to buy Milan in 1986 for 25 billion lire (€12.91 million), Berlusconi was already a household name as one of Italy's richest men, owner of the multifaceted Fininvest business empire, comprising interests in real estate, television, banking, insurance and much else besides. Today, that empire is worth €6.9bn, according to *Forbes*.

Born into a middle class Milan family in September 1936, the son of an employee at a small Milan bank, Berlusconi graduated with a law degree from Milan University. Crucially, his father Luigi was a stolid Milan supporter who often took his young son with him to the old Arena stadium on Sundays, instilling a life-long attachment to the club.

Famously, Berlusconi funded himself during his student days by working as a compere and crooner on ocean liners, accompanied on the piano by fellow student, Fedele Confalonieri. Significantly, Confalonieri remained a life-long friend and business ally of Berlusconi, still serving today as the president of Mediaset, the mass media company which controls the Berlusconi TV channels, *Canale 5*, *Rete 4* and *Italia Uno*.

A less well-known feature of Berlusconi's business career was his unfailing loyalty to men like Confalonieri and Adriano Galliani (his managing director first at Milan and latterly at Monza), and Marcello Dell'Utri (one time head of Publi-Italia, the Fininvest advertising money box and the man who largely created his Forza Italia political party for him).

By the time he bought Milan, Berlusconi had rocketed through the late 1960s and '70s building his business empire, firstly through real estate speculation and then, almost by chance, through television. The residents at one of his most innovative and exclusive real estate developments, Milano 2, had pestered him about using one of the cable channels at the gated, luxury complex in the green, north of Milan as a news channel for the estate. Thus was born "*Telemilano*", forerunner of *Canale 5*, today the flag bearer of the Berlusconi media empire.

By the mid-1980s, the once mighty Milan (the first Italian club to win the European Cup, beating Benfica in 1963) was in trouble, burdened with debt, apparently in decline following two relegations in 1980 and 1982, and up for grabs.

As a well-heeled son of the city Milan, many saw Berlusconi as the logical new owner of the club he supported as a boy. Even if important advisors like his eldest daughter Marina and old ally Confalonieri were reportedly opposed to the idea, Berlusconi eventually gave the OK to the purchase, with the deal being finalised in February 1986, thus beginning an astonishing roller-coaster ride to the top of world football.

The first clear signal that something radically different was about to happen

came five months later, in July 1986, when Berlusconi presented his new-look club for the 1986-87 season to 10,000 expectant supporters gathered at the historic Arena ground in Milan. To the accompaniment of Wagner's "*Ride of the Valkyries*", three helicopters containing players, officials and, above all, Berlusconi himself flew into the old ground, landing on the pitch. No one had ever seen anything quite like this in Italian football.

Very shortly, the new Berlusconi mantra was out: "We want to win and we want to do so playing good football, and we want to get back to the top of Italian and world football."

Berlusconi himself set about assembling the key parts in his new team. Firstly, he sacked veteran Swedish coach Nils Liedholm, a household name in Italian football both as coach and ex-player. Surprisingly, he chose to replace him with former shoe salesman, Arrigo Sacchi, a guy who had never played top-level professional football and who, at the time, was coaching Parma in the third division.

Berlusconi had seen Sacchi at close hand since his Parma had eliminated the Liedholm-coached Milan from the Italian Cup during that 1986-87 season. Sacchi's Parma had played more than well against Milan, but appointing him as coach still seemed recklessly bold. Only former Serie A greats with Serie A coaching experience would normally have been expected to get the job.

Key ally... Berlusconi and Adriano Galliani

The rest, of course, is history. Appointed for the 1987-88 season, Sacchi won the *Scudetto* at the first time of asking, in the process playing attacking football of the kind rarely, if ever, seen before in Serie A.

Of course, Sacchi was greatly

helped by the wonderful squad that Berlusconi and his men had assembled – the two Dutchmen, Marco van Basten and Ruud Gullit; 19-year-old left-back Paolo Maldini; accomplished defender Franco Baresi; midfield schemer Roberto Donadoni; strikers Pietro Paolo Virdis, Daniele Massaro and Chicco Evani, to name just a few.

Berlusconi himself, having seen a video of Van Basten, signed up the player for the 1987-88 season, after inviting him to a meeting at his Villa San Martino residence at Arcore near Milan, as early as July 1986. Likewise, he himself travelled to Amsterdam in February 1987 to sign up Gullit. A third, equally important Dutchman, namely Frank Rijkaard, was added to the squad in 1989, just in time to play an important role in the winning of that season's European Cup.

From the start, Berlusconi's Milan represented a technical and commercial revolution in Italian football. On the one hand, the old "defend first and try not to concede one" philosophy went out the window. On the other, Berlusconi showed that he was willing to pay for the best players. Players like Baresi, Van Basten, Carlo Ancelotti and others were earning much more than their English First Division counterparts in those early years.

On the first occasion that this writer met Berlusconi, it was at a Rome news conference in the spring of 1988 where he was promoting a business deal that his Programma Italia advertising company had just concluded with Soviet Union authorities, no less.

As he sang the praises of his bold new deal that day 25 years ago, it was hard not to be impressed by his upmarket sales patter, his charm, his energy, his command of his subject and, above all, his supreme self-confidence. When a colleague asked if a few of the journalists could have an "extra-time" supplement to the presser to talk to him about football, he readily agreed, notwithstanding the fact that he had already been talking for more than an hour.

He loved to talk about football. He outlined plans for the future – the need for more TV coverage, obviously; the need for much bigger club squads given that the top clubs would be facing an ever heavier schedule; the need for professional referees. He argued that football authorities, national federations and international ruling bodies, such as FIFA and UEFA, were hopelessly slow and conservative.

Above all, he outlined his plans for Milan, ambitions that were about to be realised much sooner than most of us imagined. He had, as one of his favourite football sons, former Milan great Demetrio Albertini, put it on the day of his death: "an uncanny ability to realise an inspirational idea. He was very, very incisive."

The last few years of Berlusconi's footballing life were marked by two typical moments in his life and times. Firstly, there was the strange sale of his beloved Milan in 2017, firstly to an unknown Chinese consortium led by a certain Li Yonghong. One year later, the US hedge fund, Elliott Management, took over the club and, by the spring of 2022, Milan were picking up yet another Serie A crown – moving them to joint-second on all-time league title victories alongside city rivals Inter on 19.

The other moment had started back in October 2018, just 18 months after Berlusconi had sold Milan when he opted, along with his old pal Galliani, to get back in the game by paying €2.9m for Serie C club Monza, just down the road from his Arcore residence.

Five years and two promotions later, Monza concluded a terrific first-ever season in Serie A to finish mid-table in 11th position last June. One week later, Berlusconi died. Fittingly, he left the world football stage on a winning note.

Dream Team... Carlo Ancelotti, Frank Rijkaard, Marco van Basten and Ruud Gullit line up in a wall for Berlusconi's Milan

> "We want to win and we want to do so playing good football, and we want to get back to the top of Italian and world football"
>
> Berlusconi after taking control of Milan

Overachieving...Berlusconi's Monza side celebrate in last season's Serie A

6 of the best

AFCON U23 Stars

Mark Gleeson picks out some of Africa's hottest young talents from the summer's youth tournament

1 Ibrahim ADEL

EGYPT

Losing in the final of the Under-23 Africa Cup of Nations for Adel was tempered by the fact that he was voted Player of the Tournament and attracted the attention of several European teams. The 22-year-old winger, who represented the Pharaohs' at the Tokyo Olympics, was well worth his award.

His only goal of the competition was an important one: the winner against Mali in the group phase, which set Egypt up to go on and qualify for next year's Olympics in Paris. Injury in extra-time of the final against Morocco, where Egypt gave up an early lead to lose 2-1, did not help his side's cause.

Adel, an excellent dribbler who provides regular assists, has four senior caps and plays his club football with Pyramids, quarter-finalists in this year's African Confederation Cup.

2 Hamza ALAA

EGYPT

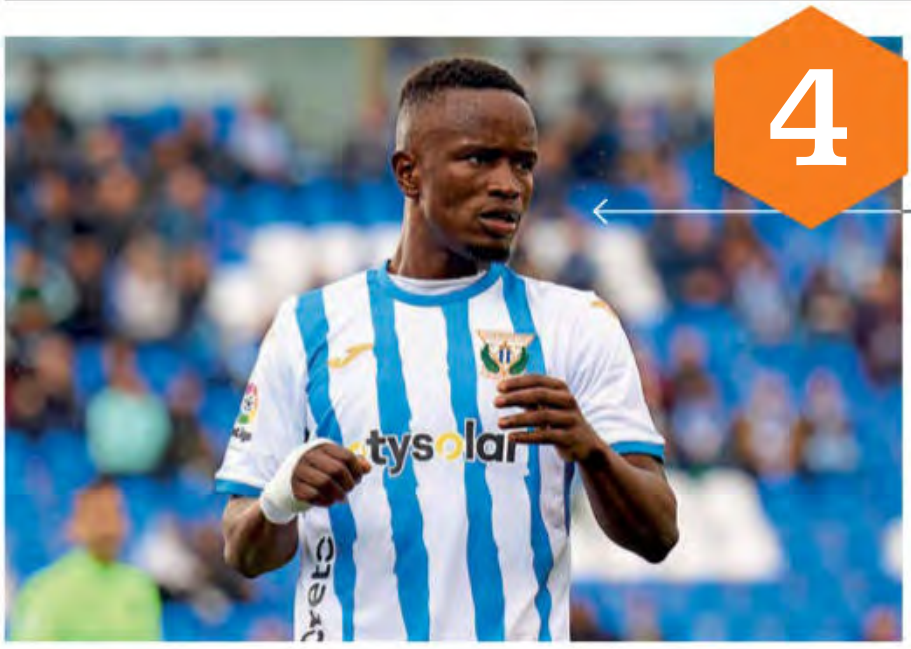
Down the pecking order at African champions Al Ahly, Alaa's performances ensured he has now staked a claim as a potential future No.1 for the Cairo giants. He has played only 15 minutes of first-team football for his club but was voted top goalkeeper at the U23 tournament and, with Al Ahly's long-standing first choice keeper Mohamed El Shenawy struggling with injuries last season, there is now the possibility of succession.

The 22-year-old put in some authoritative displays to keep clean sheets in all three group games and the semi-final against Guinea, before eventually conceding in the final versus Morocco.

3 Ibrahima CISSE
MALI

The centre-back was a key component of the Mali side that finished third in the tournament, ensuring a trip to the Olympics next year. Some key tackles from the tall No.5 ensured that the decisive third-place play-off match against Guinea went to extra-time, before Mali won 4-3 on penalties.

The French-born Cisse is at Schalke and, with the club back in the second tier of German football this season, is expected to get first-team opportunities. The German club went out of their way to watch over their asset, sending officials to Morocco for the U23 tournament, after Cisse had struggled with injury last season on loan at Belgian side Gent.



4 Seydouba CISSE
GUINEA

The midfielder was the engine room of the Guinea side that narrowly missed out on a place at the Paris Olympics after losing a penalty shootout to Mali for third spot.

Cisse has been on the books of Leganes for the past three seasons, emerging as a regular last campaign in the Spanish second tier. His passing range and astute distribution of the ball was what made him stand out and is likely to see him become a regular for his country's senior side when the 2026 World Cup qualifiers start in November.

The Spanish side signed him from youth club FC Atouga in his home country after spotting him at the Under-17 World Cup in India in 2017.

5 Abdessamad EZZALZOULI
MOROCCO

The Barcelona prodigy, also known as "Ez Abde", hesitated initially to throw in his international lot with Morocco and did not accept a senior call-up for the Africa Cup of Nations finals in Cameroon in early 2022, under pressure to follow Ansu Fati's path into the Spanish set-up.

But he has since gone on to win seven senior caps for Morocco, three of them in substitute appearances at the Qatar World Cup. He was a key component of Morocco's home win at the Under-23 Cup of Nations and will be their kingpin in Paris next year. With three goals and three assists he won this tournament's top scorer award, and is now expected to return to Barca after a loan spell at Osasuna.

6 Abdul FATAWU ISSAHAKU
GHANA

There were no goals from the Sporting teenager as Ghana crashed out early, despite being one of the favourites to finish in the top three and qualify for the Olympics. Ghana have a strong Olympic tradition, taking Africa's first soccer medal when they won bronze in Barcelona in 1992, but this time only Fatawu impressed, reminding of his displays from the 2021 U20 AFCON when Ghana won the title. The 19-year-old was full of innovation, skills and some daring but the quality around him let him down.

He is originally from the academy in Tamale in northern Ghana, created by FC Utrecht, and was part of Ghana's 2022 World Cup squad.

Glenn Moore

Snakes & ladders

Every leap of progress in women's football appears to be matched by a step backwards somewhere else

"Disappointed"... England's players said a resolution had still not been achieved

In the build-up to the World Cup, there were disputes between governing bodies and players in Jamaica, South Africa, Nigeria, Canada and England, all teams competing in the finals. In each case at the heart of the issue, as it so often is as the sport grows, was money.

Some stemmed from FIFA announcing they were to pay World Cup prize money direct to players. This would appear to have been aimed at those federations where prize money has a habit of ending up in the pockets of administrators rather than the players.

The sums were significant, especially for players who were effectively part-time and in developing economies where the dollar goes rather further than in Western cities. Every player competing in the group stage would receive $30,000 (£24,000) with the pay-out rising through the knockout stages to $270,000 (£213,000) for each player in the winning squad.

In England, it is understood the Football Association would thus not be paying extra bonus prize money, as that was in line with what they would have paid from the cash usually distributed directly to federations. England players already received £10,000 each to help their families go to Australia to attend the tournament. The players pushed back, before pausing the discussions on the eve of the tournament.

"We view the successful conclusion of these discussions...as key for the growth of Women's Football in England," the players said in a statement. "With our opening game on the horizon, we Lionesses have decided to pause discussions, with full intentions of revisiting them following the tournament."

> "We view the successful conclusion of these discussions ...as key for the growth of Women's Football in England"
>
> England players on their dispute with the FA

Meanwhile, South Africa's players refused to participate in a World Cup send-off match. Partly this was because the match, against 150th-ranked Botswana, was played at a stadium that has been banned for hosting men's top-flight games because it is sub-standard. But the main issue was a lack of proper contracts for the players, and no written agreements on pay. With several clubs refusing to release players to replace the World Cup squad, South Africa fielded a makeshift team that included a 13-year-old and lost 5-0 to Botswana.

The dispute was only settled when billionaire South African businessman Patrice Motsepe, president of CAF, stepped in to provide funding.

In dispute with his employers... Nigeria coach Randy Waldrum

Outside aid was also invoked for Jamaica – though in their case via crowd-funding. Campaigns set up by the mother of midfielder Havana Solaun and the Reggae Girlz Foundation raised more than $90,000 to help cover their training camp, travel, food and support staff. This came after players issued an open letter asking the Jamaican Football Federation to meet their obligations, and pay owed salaries.

In Nigeria, the dispute was also very public with coach Randy Waldrum at war with his employers. Waldrum, who combines the post with a college coaching role in North America, said he was owed more than seven months' pay, players were owed more than two years', he was being denied staff and would have quit but for loyalty to the players. The federation's communications chief reportedly responded by saying that "Mr Blabbermouth Waldrum" was an "incompetent loudmouth" and the "worst coach to have handled the Super Falcons of Nigeria by a country mile".

In Canada, meanwhile, players remain in dispute with a federation so pressed financially, despite both women's and men's teams enjoying unprecedented success, that it had explored the impact of bankruptcy.

Canada's financial issues were in stark contrast to the situation in Europe where the sport's commercial clout was underlined when global behemoth Amazon inked a

multi-year deal with UEFA to sponsor their women's competitions from U19 and futsal to Euro 2025, the Champions League and Finalissima. Streaming platform DAZN, who will be charging for the bulk of their Champions League coverage next season, then added the Frauen Bundesliga to their portfolio with a four-year deal.

England's WSL already has a £6m-a-year broadcast deal, a record for women's football. That has helped to drive commercial revenue, according to Deloitte, for the league's 12 clubs up to £32m in 2021-22 from £20m the previous year, a 60 per cent rise (the second tier league receives £2m). And that was before England won the Euros, which helped increase average gates from 1,923 to 5,616 in 2022-23.

There was nevertheless an aggregate £14m pre-tax loss, indicating the league's finances are not dissimilar when it comes to profit/loss to the English men's leagues. It's just the numbers are smaller.

Another similarity was the disparity between clubs. Arsenal, Chelsea and the Manchester clubs, United and City, generated 70 per cent of revenue, the other eight clubs 30 per cent.

Wages grew, worryingly so at some clubs with Brighton paying out nearly four times what they earned and Manchester City 98 per cent of income. Arsenal's ratio was only 63 per cent – but without funding by the men's club it would have been 242 per cent. That aspect reflected how the accounts can be misleading due to investment from the parent club – not that owner subsidy is exactly unusual in football.

The growing awareness of the financial opportunities was highlighted by the European Club Association staging a Women's Football Summit, which included a presentation from Bay FC co-founder and two-time Olympic champion Aly Wagner.

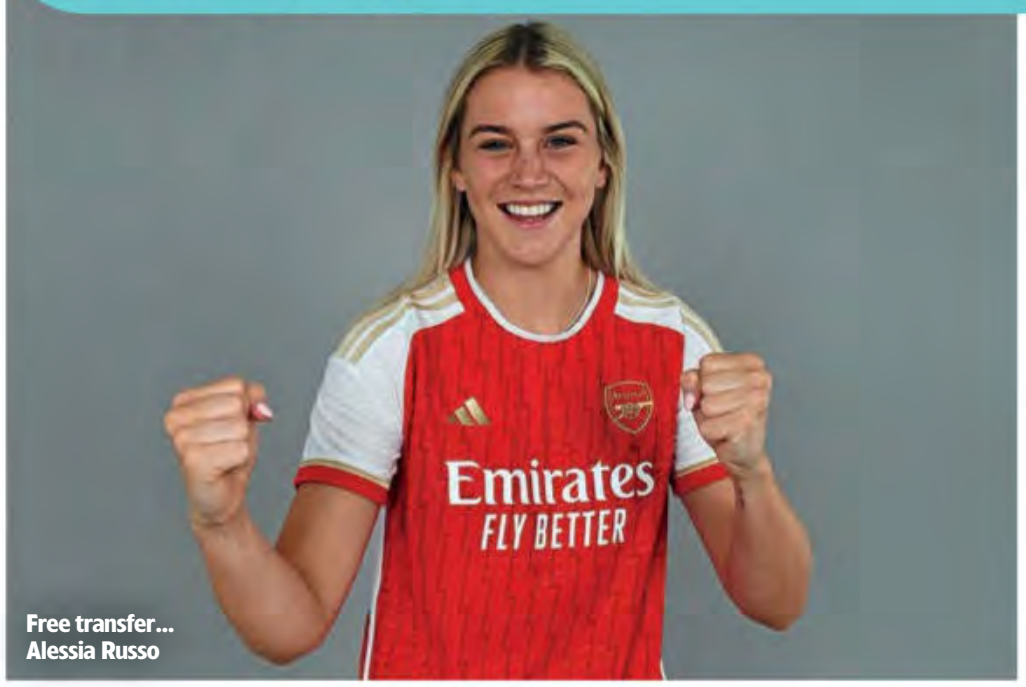
Bay FC are the new San Francisco Bay-area based club due to join NWSL in 2024. After a difficult couple of years the US league is bouncing back. The league went into the World Cup break, with two-thirds of the regular season completed, with average gates nearly 20 per cent up.

California, which did not have a team until 2022, appears a hot spot with 2022 expansion clubs San Diego Wave and Angel City topping the attendance charts with averages of 20,680 and 19,401 respectively, both eclipsing long-time leaders Portland Thorns (17,316).

However more than half the league still draw fewer than 10,000 with North Carolina Courage and Chicago Red Stars averaging less than half that. And back in England Reading, upon being relegated, have gone part-time.

Progress remains a game of snakes and ladders.

Round-up



Free transfer... Alessia Russo

RUSSO JOINS GUNNERS

In the summer's major move, England centre-forward Alessia Russo joined Arsenal at the expiry of her contract, with Manchester United also losing Spanish defender Ona Batlle on a free, to Barcelona.

Arsenal had had a women's world-record £500,000 bid for Russo rejected in January. The Gunners lost Brazilian defender Rafaelle to Orlando Pride, but replaced her with PSG's Swedish defender Amanda Ilestedt.

Among other major moves, Dutch midfielder Jill Roord joined Manchester City for a club-record fee and Wolfsburg team-mate Pauline Bremer signed for Brighton, while Albion also captured Spanish midfielder Vicky Losada – formerly of Arsenal, Manchester City and Barcelona – from Roma.

Aston Villa goalkeeper Hannah Hampton joined Chelsea along with Canadian defender Ashley Lawrence from PSG and Lyon forward Catarina Macario. Villa replaced Hampton with Netherlands No.1 Daphne van Domselaar, while Spurs signed Switzerland defender Luana Buhler from Hoffenheim.

Elsewhere, Japan midfielder Saki Kumagai left Bayern Munich for Roma while Danish striker Signe Bruun swapped Lyon for Real Madrid, who also acquired Australian winger Hayley Raso from Manchester City.

Madrid-bound... Signe Bruun

TIGRES ROAR IN MEXICO

Tigres UANL won the Champion of Champions play-off in Mexico, defeating America 3-0 on aggregate in the two-legged contest between the winners of the Apertura and Clausura.

WSL return ...Jill Roord spent two years at Arsenal

Jacqueline Ovalle's fine solo goal 24 minutes into the second leg effectively settled the contest after American striker Mia Fishel scored twice in the first leg.

Fishel, who went south rather than be drafted by Orlando Pride in 2022, ended the season as top scorer with 35 goals.

POTTER TO LEAD RANGERS

Ex-England international Jo Potter was appointed manager of Rangers, replacing Malky Thompson. Potter, 38, had been assistant coach at Birmingham City.

FINED KERALA CLOSE TEAM

Indian Super League club Kerala Blasters closed their women's team citing the financial impact of a fine imposed on the men's team for walking off the pitch during a play-off match against Bengaluru.

The decision, which was described as temporary, was criticised by India's national team goalkeeper Aditi Chauhan. "So the men's team gets a fine for what they did and the money comes from the women's team budget by shutting it down? Great, that's how women's football will develop in India. Horrible!" Chauhan tweeted.

The team, which had existed for less than a year, came third in the second-tier Kerala Women's League last season.

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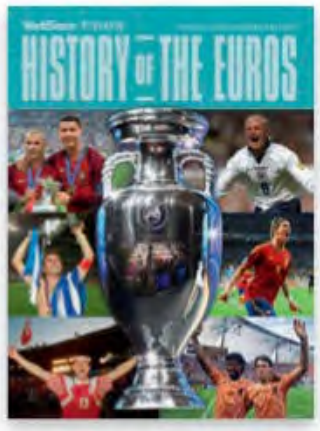

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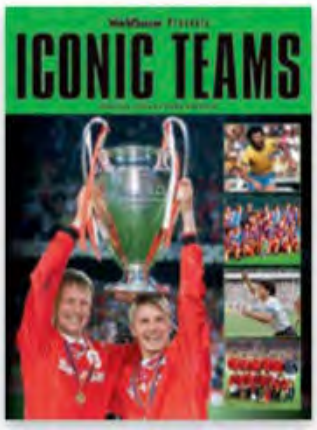

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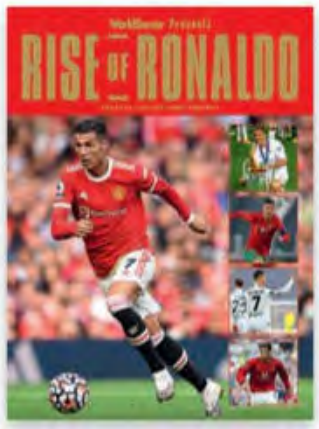

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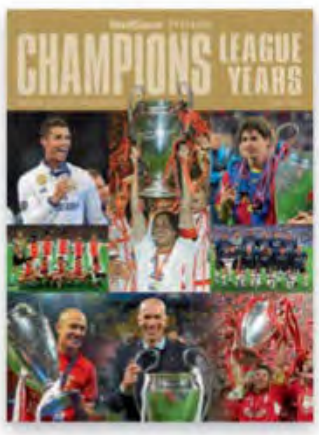

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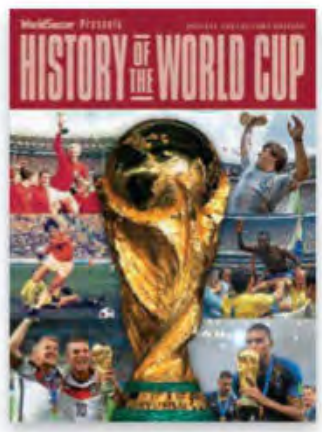

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Mexico rule CONCACAF again

Gold Cup review by James Nalton

THE FINAL

MEXICO 1
(Gimenez 88)
PANAMA 0

Mexico reclaimed their Gold Cup crown with an encouraging display at this year's edition of CONCACAF's biennial tournament, after which they will be hoping to put a difficult and disappointing few years behind them.

Along with the United States and Canada, Mexico are one of the co-hosts of the next World Cup in 2026, and this victory will come as something of a relief as they look to reassert themselves as a force in the region in preparation for making their mark at that tournament.

This latest victory, defeating Panama 1-0 in the final, saw *El Tri* maintain their status as the most successful team in Gold Cup history, making it nine wins in total and winning the title back from the United States who defeated them in the previous final in 2021.

The scorer of the late winner against Panama, Santiago Gimenez, had been on the pitch for less than five minutes when he bustled through the opposition's defence in the 88th minute to net the game's only goal.

It was a Mexican counter-attack, initiated by a ball by Orbelin Pineda from inside his own half, but the goal was all about Gimenez.

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, but having grown up in Mexico where his father Christian played for Veracruz, 22-year-old Gimenez added international glory to an Eredivisie title won with Feyenoord earlier in the year to which he contributed 15 goals.

It was also a defining moment in this tournament for Mexico's interim manager, Jaime Lozano, who made the decision to introduce Gimenez to the game in place of Henry Martin with five minutes of normal time remaining. He couldn't have hoped for a better outcome.

Mexico had plenty of support throughout these Gold Cup games in the United States, but nowhere more so than at the sold-out SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, which was a sight to behold on the night of the final.

The green shirts of Mexico filled the stands as 72,963 spectators packed into the home of American football teams the LA Rams and LA Chargers of the NFL. The attendance was higher than that for NFL's Super Bowl LVI, hosted at the same stadium in 2022.

It's a region in which Mexico prides itself on being the best team

The SoFi Stadium in Inglewood is also listed as the Los Angeles venue for the World Cup but, on this evidence, it will be as much a Mexican venue as an American one. Indeed, this game was a good audition for it to host the final in 2026.

"Today the atmosphere was like a World Cup, rather than a Gold Cup," said Lozano after the game. "That fills me with joy and excitement."

Lozano had taken charge of the team following a disappointing Mexican showing in the CONCACAF Nations League finals, in which they lost 3-0 to the United States at the semi-final stage. It led to the sacking of Diego Cocca, who himself had only recently taken over from Gerardo Martino following the 2022 World Cup failure.

Lozano has previous experience at

Match winner... Santiago Gimenez scores in the final

***Campeones*...Mexico players celebrate with the trophy**

international level with Mexico, having managed the men's team to a bronze medal at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Japan in 2021. With 11 players from that squad present at the Gold Cup, including the three overage players of Luis Romo, Henry Martin and captain Guillermo Ochoa, he has the full support of the squad. If he does get the job on a full-time basis, it will certainly be a popular move among the players.

Even Gianni Infantino, the FIFA president and guest at the final, appeared to endorse Lozano's permanent appointment by wishing him luck for the World Cup after handing him his medal. "I think Infantino didn't know that my contract ended here," laughed Lozano after the game, but his record is hard to ignore.

Mexico's recent record has been uninspiring at best: they qualified for Qatar unconvincingly, then failed to progress beyond the group stage in their worst performance since 1982. Defeats to the United States in both of the CONCACAF Nations League finals, as well as losing to them in the 2021 Gold Cup final, has also been difficult to take.

It's a region in which Mexico prides itself on being the best team, but the quality of the United States and Canada, and the challenges posed by nations such as Panama, have made this a competitive region. And better for it.

Following their meeting in the Nations League final, the US and Canada both sent rotated squads to this tournament and were not at full strength. In doing so, they relinquished the opportunity to challenge for the top national team honour in their region. It could be argued that such a decision meant Mexico's rivals to the north were not taking the tournament seriously, but *El Tri* had no choice. And they reaped the rewards, although Panama still gave them a tough test.

Despite the heavy Mexican presence at the final in California, the striking blue and red of the Panama flags still shone through, just as their team did throughout the tournament. They were deserved finalists, having dispatched hosts and defending champions the United States on penalties in a semi-final in San Diego. Having finished fifth in 2022 World Cup qualifying, they should be considered a growing force in the CONCACAF region.

Panama midfielder Adalberto Carrasquilla was named the tournament's best player despite his silver medal, and in the opening minutes of the final he showed why, sending Ismael Diaz through on goal with a pass from the heart of midfield. It

Player of the Tournament...Panama midfielder Adalberto Carrasquilla holds the finals' Golden Ball

Skipper...Mexico captain Guillermo Ochoa lifts the Golden Glove

was a great chance that could have altered the narrative from the outset as Panama looked to become the first Central American nation to win the Gold Cup, but Diaz couldn't get the ball out of his feet and the chance disappeared.

Mexico also had early opportunities but a Henry Martin goal was ruled out for offside and Orlando Mosquera made a couple of good saves in the Panama goal.

Panama controlled periods of the match and have a possession-based game plan that will serve them well going forward, but Mexico edged the second half and were deserved winners thanks to Gimenez's moment of brilliance.

> "It would be a dream to lead my national team in a World Cup, and even more in a World Cup where we'll be the home side"
>
> **Mexico's interim coach Jaime Lozano**

Lozano's centre-back pairing of Cesar Montes and Johan Vasquez didn't concede a goal when they started together, and Mexico's only hiccup came when they

TEAM OF THE TOURNAMENT

GOALKEEPER

Matt TURNER
(United States)
Mexico's Guillermo Ochoa won the tournament's official Golden Glove award, but the Arsenal keeper was also impressive throughout the competition, particularly standing out in the penalty shootout win against Canada, becoming the first American goalkeeper to make multiple saves in a penalty shootout since Kasey Keller in 2002. He has now surely secured his place as US first choice.

DEFENDERS

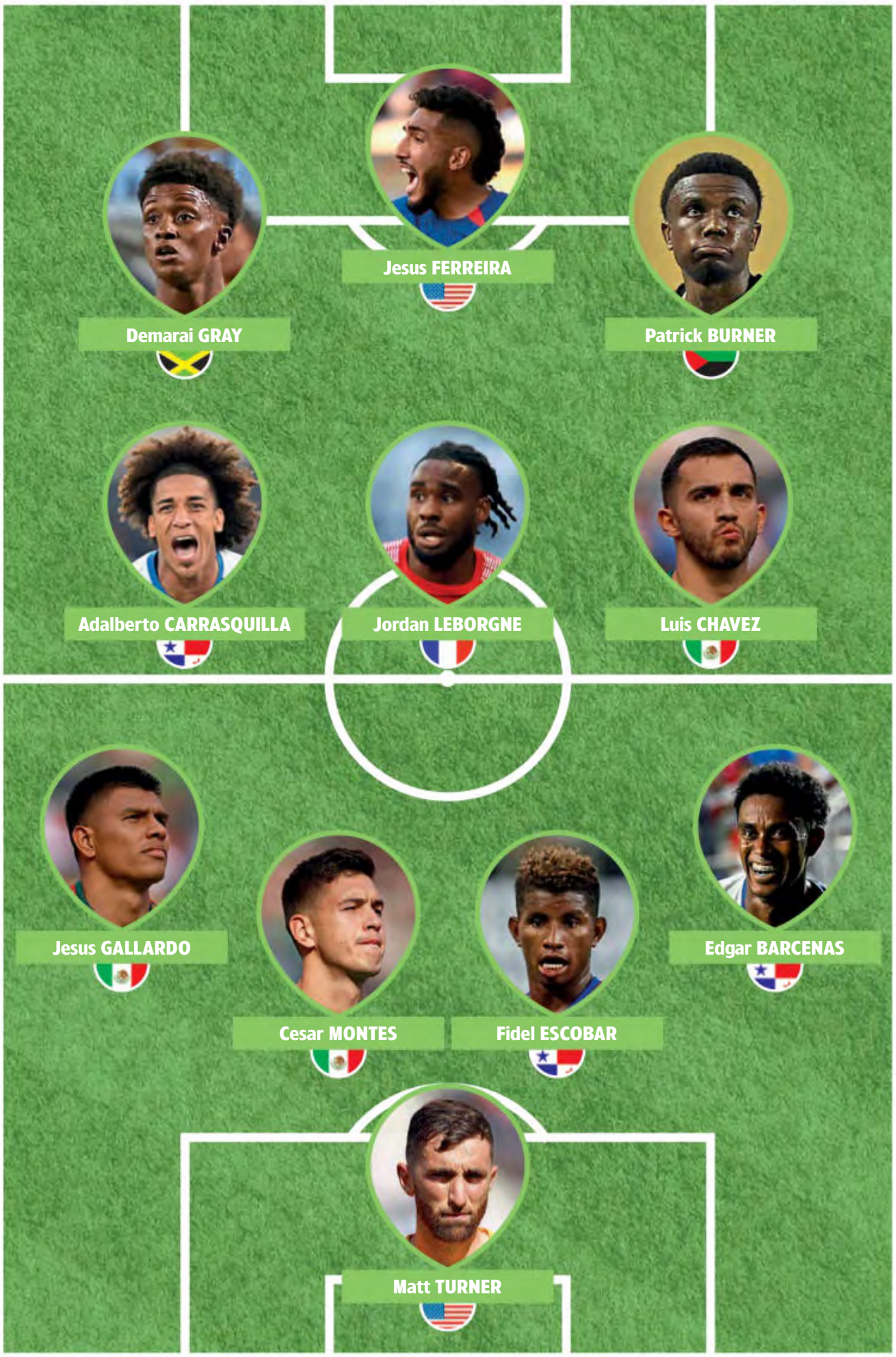
Edgar BARCENAS
(Panama)
Normally a winger, Barcenas filled in at right wing-back for *Los Canaleros* and was especially useful in the knockout rounds. He scored in the quarter-finals against Qatar, adding to a group-stage goal against Costa Rica when stationed further forward, and also dispatched his spot-kick in the penalty-shootout win over the US. He made full use of his attacking qualities down the flank.

Fidel ESCOBAR
(Panama)
Barcenas said that Panama's right-sided centre-back Escobar helped him adapt to his new role, where the Deportivo Saprissa defender was himself a solid presence. Escobar was the standout part of a rear-guard that was able to shut up shop when required, until that final moment against Mexico.

Cesar MONTES
(Mexico)
Once Montes returned to the Mexico team for the knockout rounds following a suspension, they didn't concede a single goal for the rest of the tournament. They were the only team against whom semi-final opponents Jamaica failed to score, with the Espanyol man playing a key role alongside centre-back partner Johan Vasquez and right-back Jorge Sanchez.

Jesus GALLARDO
(Mexico)
Gallardo's assist against Jamaica, as he skipped past Damion Lowe and put the ball on a plate for Roberto Alvarado, was a tournament highlight, and the left-back was an attacking outlet for Mexico throughout. It was an impressive outing in one of several positions in which *El Tri* need more consistency.

Upset...Panama celebrate beating United States in the semi-final



MIDFIELDERS

Adalberto CARRASQUILLA *(Panama)*
The Houston Dynamo midfielder was the tournament's standout player and also one of its most popular. The hub in the centre of the park, he epitomised everything that was good about this Panama team and deservedly won the award for best player.

Luis CHAVEZ *(Mexico)*
Chavez was one of only four Mexicans to start every game in this tournament, along with other key players Luis Romo, Orbelin Pineda and captain Guillermo Ochoa. The Pachuca midfielder scored an excellent free-kick against Jamaica, adding to a group-stage strike versus Honduras.

Jordan LEBORGNE *(Guadeloupe)*
Started all three of Guadeloupe's group games and registered an assist in each. The team's attacking players all impressed at times during the group stage, with Matthias Phaeton and Ange-Freddy Plumain netting two goals apiece, but Leborgne contributed in each.

FORWARDS

Patrick BURNER *(Martinique)*
Moving from full-back to the wing paid off for Burner as the Nimes man scored three goals in the two games he started during the group stage. He spent time on either wing and netted twice in one of the most entertaining games of the finals, Martinique's 6-4 defeat to Costa Rica.

Jesus FERREIRA *(United States)*
The finals' top scorer hit back-to-back hat-tricks in his last two group games and now has 15 goals in 23 caps for his country. An excellent extra-time volley, which saw his team equalise in the semi-final against Panama, was a highlight before he missed his penalty in the shootout.

Demarai GRAY *(Jamaica)*
The Everton winger was the latest English Premier League addition to this Jamaica side. Where previous line-ups have looked somewhat disjointed Gray knited things together, and he assisted a goal on his debut against the US, before scoring twice against Trinidad & Tobago.

rotated the line-up in their final group game, against Qatar, with progression already secured.

"These results open opportunities," Lozano said after the final. "Obviously, it would be a dream to lead my national team in a World Cup, and even more in a World Cup where we'll be the home side, but what I'm experiencing now is itself a dream."

Mexico still have plenty of work to do, though. They weren't totally convincing at this tournament despite always looking like the team most likely to win it, but they at least have something to build on.

There has also been much more positivity around the camp under Lozano's stewardship. The federation's next move, deciding whether to extend Lozano's tenure or whom they appoint otherwise, will play a big part in the state of the national team going into 2026.

The 2023-24 CONCACAF Nations League will also be important as it decides which guest teams from the region will play in the 2024 Copa America, hosted in the US. These tournaments will be seen as vital competitive exercises ahead of 2026, given the host teams will not have to go through the rigours of CONCACAF qualifying.

The Copa America could be the next best barometer of where Mexico are at but, for now, they are back on top of CONCACAF, where they believe they belong.

TEAM BY TEAM

CANADA

A less-than-full-strength Canada squad were far from convincing in the group stage. They only managed to draw with Guadeloupe in their one home game of the tournament in Toronto. They redeemed themselves somewhat with a close-run quarter-final with the United States, eventually losing on penalties.

COSTA RICA

A handful of experienced players mixed with some new faces as *Los Ticos* face something of a rebuild if they're to retain their place as a top CONCACAF team. An eventful 6-4 win against Martinique secured a quarter-final place where they lost to Mexico.

CUBA

Arichel Hernandez's strike from the penalty spot against Guadeloupe was the first goal for Cuba at the biennial Gold Cup since 2015. Goalkeeper Raiko Arozarena of Tampa Bay Rowdies made some impressive saves at the other end throughout, but none of this was enough for Cuba to collect any points.

EL SALVADOR

Two draws were not sufficient for this well-supported El Salvador side, whose fans played their part in some vibrant Gold Cup group stage atmospheres. Their team couldn't quite get the win they needed after a disappointing defeat to Martinique in the opener.

GUADELOUPE

Progress was halted when Matthias Phaeton's penalty was saved in their last group game against Guatemala. The tournament was worse for their early exit. Phaeton, Ange-Freddy Plumain, Anthony Baron, Thierry Ambrose and Co defeated Cuba in entertaining fashion and drew with group favourites Canada.

GUATEMALA

The Guatemala supporters brought a liveliness that was matched on the pitch when the team defeated Guadeloupe 3-2 in a dramatic final group game. There was no shame in losing in the knockouts to a strong Jamaica team by a single goal. A promising outing that offers excitement for the future.

HAITI

The third-placed team in 2019, this is now the second tournament in a row in which Haiti have exited in the group stage. A dramatic added-time goal from Frantzdy Pierrot gave them an opening-game win versus Qatar, but those were to be their only points as two defeats followed.

HONDURAS

Honduras might consider themselves unlucky not to have qualified for the knockout rounds ahead of Qatar after getting the job done against Haiti in the final group game. Qatar's shock defeat of Mexico on the same night saw the guest team progress at the expense of the plucky Central Americans.

Top scorer...Jesus Ferreira celebrates beating Canada in the quarter-finals

Aerial duel...Honduras' Deiby Flores wins a header v Qatar

High-scoring thriller...Costa Rica forward Anthony Contreras celebrates scoring in *Los Ticos'* 6-4 victory against Martinique

Under-strength... Canada failed to impress

Future contenders ...Jamaica

Impressive...Cuba goalkeeper Raiko Arozarena

Dramatic... Guatemala's Rubio Rubin celebrates scoring against Guadeloupe

First-ever CONCACAF Gold Cup finals appearance...Saint Kitts & Nevis

JAMAICA

Jamaica showed signs they could be serious contenders in the CONCACAF region in the coming years. The addition of a number of English-born stars from the Premier League has given them an exciting attack, but the 3-0 defeat to Mexico in their semi-final reveals a need to bolster their defence.

MARTINIQUE

Patrick Burner's three goals put him second in the scoring charts after the group stage but were not enough to see Martinique through. Only needing a point from their final group game, the French-Caribbean island lost 6-4 to Costa Rica. Burner plays at full-back for his club Nimes, but shone here from the wing.

MEXICO

There was more pressure on *El Tri* to win this tournament than the no-nonsense manner in which the team progressed through the knockout rounds might have suggested. There is still plenty of room for improvement, but beating a strong Jamaica side in the semi-final was a highlight. The final celebrations showed just how much it meant.

PANAMA

The revelation of the tournament, introducing many fans to a team that had performed well under the radar in 2022 World Cup qualifying and now looks to challenge CONCACAF's major players. A run to the final was thoroughly deserved, and Panama showed they belonged there by going toe-to-toe with Mexico.

QATAR

Carlos Queiroz's side made it past the group stage courtesy of a shock win against a rotated Mexico. Qatar were guests for a second tournament in a row, but couldn't match their run to the semi-final in 2021, losing 4-0 to Panama in the quarter-final.

SAINT KITTS & NEVIS

Wins on penalties against both Curacao and French Guiana in the Prelims saw Saint Kitts & Nevis qualify for their first-ever Gold Cup finals. Having been drawn in the same group as much-fancied Jamaica and the United States, three heavy defeats and no goals scored was not unexpected, but being in the tournament itself was progress.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

An opening-game victory against Saint Kitts & Nevis gave way to heavy defeats to Jamaica (4-1) and the United States (6-0). Trinidad & Tobago might not have been expected to progress from the group, but they will be disappointed to not have put up more of a fight.

UNITED STATES

The defending champions tested their depth, leaving out star players who had won the CONCACAF Nations League for the second consecutive time a month earlier under interim coach B.J. Callaghan. This tournament was his last outing before Gregg Berhalter's return ahead of the 2026 World Cup, and he did well with the players available to him before losing on penalties to Panama.

South America

TIM VICKERY

Copa Libertadores round-up

No end in sight for Brazilian dominance of South America's premier club competition as group stage concludes

For three of South America's ten nations the Copa Libertadores ended at the group stage – with barely a surprise.

Sporting Cristal came close to a place in the last 16 and Alianza Lima were more competitive than for many years. Even so, for the tenth consecutive campaign no side from Peru made it through to the knockout phase, and there is no Venezuelan presence for the seventh successive year. And for the fourth time in five, no team from Chile has made the cut. Both Chile and Colombia have underachieved in recent times, and the final slot in the knockout phase fell between the former's Colo-Colo and the latter's Deportivo Pereira. In front of a big crowd in Santiago, tournament debutants Pereira held on for the draw they needed, and join Atletico Nacional in the last 16, making this the best group phase for Colombia since 2015.

Colo-Colo were not the only former champions to fall in the group stage. The biggest disappointments were Corinthians of Sao Paulo, the largest team from the largest city in the continent. Corinthians have got themselves in such a mess that they were eliminated with a game still to go.

The other Brazilians made it safely through. Atletico Mineiro had to dig

themselves out of a hole, and after a wonderful start Fluminense hit a wall and survived some nervy late moments. Flamengo, the reigning champions, and Internacional made sure with big home wins on the last day, while Palmeiras and Athletico Paranaense both sailed through. And so, after four consecutive Brazilian wins and three straight all-Brazilian finals, the question has to be – can anyone stop them?

The draw for the knockout rounds has split the field into two very different halves. Four of the six Brazilians are in one half, and they have all managed to avoid each other, leaving open the possibility of the country supplying all four quarter-finalists from that side.

Flamengo will certainly be strong favourites against Olimpia of Paraguay. When the two sides met in the 2021 competition, Flamengo won 9-2 on aggregate. The lesson there is clear: the financial gap between Brazil and the rest of the continent has opened up to such an extent that there is little margin for error for the underdogs. Defensively they need to be almost perfect to have any chance of keeping their opponents at bay. Olimpia coach Diego Aguirre knows Brazilian football well, and will have to come up with a plan to keep his side in the game.

Fluminense will also widely be considered favourites to get past Argentinos Juniors, although Gabriel Milito's well-coached side will aim to make it competitive. And Athletico Paranaense will hope to put behind them the trauma of the extreme altitude of La Paz and get past Bolivar of Bolivia.

And then there is the tie between Internacional and Argentine giants River Plate, who fought out a pair of pulsating 2-2 draws in the group phase three years ago. On paper River – now backed by the stadium with the largest capacity on the continent – are the strongest non-Brazilian team in the field. Martin Demichelis has made an encouraging start to his coaching career, but the defensive deficiencies are alarming: in the entire field of 32, only five teams conceded more goals than River in the group phase. The 5-1 defeat by Fluminense was their heaviest in the history of the competition, and there were times even in victory when it was a case of panic stations at the back. Their defensive resolve will now be tested.

Their great rivals Boca Juniors have enjoyed a consistent run of luck of the draw. Their form has been distinctly unimpressive, but they came through an easy group, and now face Nacional of Uruguay – solid opponents but hardly inspiring. And, in a little corner of the draw without Brazilians, if Boca get through they will face either compatriots Racing or Atletico Nacional of Colombia, who need to regroup after ending the group phase in some turmoil in the wake of a defeat in their domestic final.

In the same half of the draw are Ecuador's dangerous Independiente del Valle, the current Copa Sudamericana champions, who in addition to their splendid youth development work have also developed a sharp eye for transfer opportunities. They will be favourites against Colombia's Deportivo Pereira – but then comes the meeting with the winner of the clash of the Brazilian titans.

For the third consecutive year Palmeiras find themselves up against rivals Atletico Mineiro. Narrow winners both times before, Palmeiras are the favourites. But whoever gets through will be expected to go all the way to the final – where the chances are that they will come up against another Brazilian team.

Key clash...Deportivo Pereira (R) held on to advance ahead of Colo-Colo (L)

Holders...Flamengo secured their progress in the last group game

After four consecutive Brazilian wins and three straight all-Brazilian finals, the question has to be – can anyone stop them?

Sudamericana champions... Independiente del Valle finished top of Group E

LAST 16 DRAW

Atletico Nacional v Racing
Nacional v Boca Juniors
Atletico Mineiro v Palmeiras
Deportivo Pereira v Independiente del Valle
Bolivar v Athletico Paranaense
River Plate v Internacional
Flamengo v Olimpia
Argentinos Juniors v Fluminense

Colombia

CARL WORSWICK

The wait is over

Millonarios win their 16th league title after six-year wait

Review

Champions ...Millonarios celebrate with the league title

Patience in football so often has its limits. A process rarely lasts its due course. Yet for Bogota-based club Millonarios, reward for their stoical resolve amid a success-starved project has finally been bestowed.

With a dramatic penalty-shootout victory over arch-rivals Atletico Nacional in the Apertura league final, Millonarios clinched a 16th Colombian league title. At long last, manager Alberto Gamero's three-and-a-half-year wait was over.

As midfielder Larry Vasquez lashed home the decisive kick, Millonarios' long-suffering fans spilled onto the pitch, players leapt around in joy and fireworks whistled in the Colombian capital's night sky.

But one man remained alone. Hunched on the bench, head tucked into his soggy hands, Gamero wailed uncontrollably amid the euphoria unfolding around him. More than anyone, this was his victory.

Appointed in December 2019, the former Millonarios player had won many admirers for his team's style of play. Not only had he consistently turned Millonarios into one of the most attractive teams to watch, the 59-year-old coach had done so by tapping into the youth team, handing teenagers like Oscar Cortes and the delightfully named Beckham David Castro a chance, while selling rising stars for a healthy profit. Under iconic

Influential... Millonarios coach Alberto Gamero

captain David Macalister Silva, they also boasted a leader who symbolised the team's spirit and proud history.

Yet for all the team's undoubted promise, Gamero had just one Colombian Cup trophy to show for his not inconsiderable time in charge. Time was running out; patience was starting to wear thin.

Once again, Millonarios had soared through the early stages of this season's multi-phase championship. But as the pressure and games ramped up, like in previous campaigns, they started to stutter.

Defeat in Brazil in the Copa Sudamericana against America Mineiro was followed a few days later by another loss at minnows Boyaca Chico in the league semi-finals. Injuries were growing and important players were missing on international duty. Gamero had taken Millonarios tantalisingly close to a league title several times before, only for things to crumble at the crucial time. Was it happening again?

But this time Gamero delivered. A final-game home victory against Independiente Medellin booked Millonarios' place in the final against Colombia's most successful club, Atletico Nacional. In the first leg in Medellin, Millonarios should have won. At home, they had to battle back from going behind with Nacional scoring from their only touch in the opposition area all game. Millonarios had clocked up 31. But at 1-1, the tie went to penalties.

Yet from 12 yards Nacional weren't quite so clinical. A woefully tepid effort from Jarlan Barrera rolled into Millos goalkeeper Alvaro Montero's arms and handed substitute Vasquez the chance to return the title to the blue half of Bogota for the first time since 2017.

That Gamero's moment should come against their biggest rivals was extra special. Once upon time, Millonarios were Colombia's biggest football club. Indeed, to this day their fans continue to reminisce of the few short years in the early 1950s when they claim to have been the best team in the world. But the days of star player Alfredo Di Stefano and a famous victory over Real Madrid have long slipped into the shadows of the past.

In recent decades, ever since the Bogota club almost disappeared under the weight of bankruptcy in the early 2000s, Millonarios have had to sit back and watch Nacional add 11 league titles and a 2016 Copa Libertadores triumph. But Millos' latest title, however, edges them one behind their Medellin rivals.

Should Nacional have instead triumphed on penalties in the final, they would have had to celebrate in an empty stadium with away supporters banned from both legs after yet another season blighted by fan violence. One of the worst cases has been at Deportivo Cali, Colombia's fourth-most successful club, who are swamped with a reported debt of $20m and in danger of relegation. "I got a call saying fans were planning to attack us," complained Uruguayan goalkeeper Kevin Dawson upon walking out of the club after just six months in Colombia. "They knew where we lived, they even knew the number plates of our cars."

While Cali tackle the biggest crisis in the club's history, another Colombian club are riding at the opposite end of the spectrum. Six months ago, Deportivo Pereira won their very first Colombian title just four years after being in the second division. Ranked as the second-lowest positioned team in this year's Copa Libertadores group stage, they nonetheless went on to qualify for the knockout stages having landed a famous home win against Boca Juniors along the way.

Joining them in the last 16 are Atletico Nacional to make it the first time since 2015 that two Colombian clubs have qualified from the groups. Yet if this achievement represents marginal progress in a competition dominated by Brazil and Argentina, it was a familiar story in the Copa Sudamericana where Santa Fe and Tolima joined newly-crowned Colombian champions Millonarios in being ditched out in the groups.

For now, Gamero and Millonarios can quite deservedly wallow in the gratification of having achieved domestic glory on the back of a well-founded project. But establishing Millonarios' place back among South America's elite is the next step. Once more, patience may again prove to be key.

Hunched on the bench, head tucked into his soggy hands, Gamero wailed uncontrollably amid the euphoria unfolding around him. More than anyone, this was his victory

SEASON'S BEST

DAVID MACALISTER SILVA
(Millonarios)
Captain, leader, Mr. Millonarios; even at the ripe old age of 36, "Maca" was instrumental both on and off the pitch in the Bogota club's title charge.

COACH OF THE SEASON
Alberto Gamero
(Millonarios)
Won the 1988 league title with Millonarios as a player before finally steering the team to glory as manager this season.

NEWCOMER OF THE SEASON
Oscar Cortes
(Millonarios)
Snapped up by Lens at the end of the season for a reported €4.5m after the versatile 19-year-old winger starred for both the Colombia U20s and Millonarios.

Caribbean

STEVE MENARY

Hope for Caribbean clubs

CONCACAF restructuring now provides greater opportunities for the Caribbean's club sides

CONCACAF's elite club competition, the Champions League, has long been the preserve of clubs from central and North America.

The days when famous old Caribbean names such as Suriname's Transvaal or Haiti's Racing Club could win the competition were long gone, and despite boasting 31 of CONCACAF's 41 members, just a solitary team from the region was allowed to take part. But that has now changed.

CONCACAF has overhauled its club format into a series of competitions that provide a logical pathway to the newly re-branded 2024 "Champions Cup", which, in a format expanded from 16 to 27 clubs, will feature three Caribbean sides taken from a two-tier qualifying process.

CONCACAF president Victor Montagliani added: "This will elevate clubs and leagues from CONCACAF and provide even more compelling regional rivalries. It will also provide more international relevance to our club competitions, and a very competitive pathway as clubs strive to qualify for the FIFA Club World Cup."

The initial step is the Caribbean Club Shield, which was first staged in 2018 and this year will be played in Saint Kitts & Nevis. Transvaal have not qualified but another famous Surinamese club will be there: Robinhood were runners-up five times in the old Champions' Cup (1962-2008 era), the predecessor of the Champions League, and will be among 16 clubs looking for one of two places available to the next stage, the Caribbean Cup.

Robinhood are in Group C with Etoile Matoury from French Guiana, the Dominican Republic's O&M and B1 from Saint Lucia. O&M could be a dark horse given the Dominican Republic's shift to a full-time league, which should also benefit the likes of Jamaica's Waterhouse, and Trinidad & Tobago's Club Sando.

CONCACAF president...Victor Montagliani

For part-time teams such as B1, the competition has other benefits. "It's a good learning experience for the FA," says former Trinidad & Tobago international Brent Sancho, now an advisor to the Saint Lucia FA.

Puerto Rico's Bayamon are the holders but failed to win their domestic title and the US territory's representatives are Metropolitan. Sides from Saint Martin, Curacao, Dominica, the Cayman Islands, Martinique, Aruba, Guadeloupe and Turks & Caicos also take part.

Only 16 of the Caribbean Football Union's 31 members met CONCACAF's classification criteria for entry to the Shield, whose winners and runners-up also still need to comply with regional club licensing rules to take their places in the Caribbean Cup.

This competition is new and replaces the old Caribbean Club Championship, which was first staged in 1997 but abolished last year. The winners, the losing finalists and the third-placed side in the Caribbean Cup will qualify for the 2024 Champions Cup.

Racing Club have fallen on hard times, and no Haitian club will take part at all despite Haitian teams being the Caribbean's sole representative in the last two Champions Leagues (Violette and Cavaly) as the Ligue Haitienne was suspended last year. Haiti's two places have gone to the Dominican Republic and T&T. If Waterhouse and Club Sando qualify from the Shield, there could be four clubs from the Dominican Republic and three from T&T in the Caribbean Cup.

> "This will elevate clubs and leagues from CONCACAF and provide even more compelling regional rivalries"
>
> CONCACAF president Victor Montagliani

T&T's representatives were assigned a fortnight before the TT Premier Football League finished due to the CONCACAF draw taking place in early June. Fortunately, Defence Force and

The Caribbean Club Championship trophy...now replaced by the Caribbean Cup
Credit: CONCACAF.com

Athletic Club Port of Spain still occupied the top two places at the season's end.

T&T powerhouses Defence Force were twice winners of the old CONCACAF Champions' Cup but Jamaica's Cavalier look favourites in a group also featuring Athletic Club, Moca from the Dominican Republic and the Shield runners-up.

Group B looks tougher to call. 2022 Jamaican champions Harbour View, twice winners of the old Caribbean Club Championship, face domestic rivals Dunbeholden, the Dominican Republic's top two sides, Cibao and Atletico Pantoja, and the Shield winners.

Progressing to the 2024 Champions Cup would be a great achievement for Cibao, who were only formed in 2015. With a strong multi-national line-up, Cibao look a good bet for at least the semi-finals.

Under the new Champions Cup format, the losing Caribbean Cup finalists and the third-placed team go into round one (22 teams). The winners go straight into the round of 16 alongside LigaMX Apertura champions Pachuca and the winners of MLS, the Central American Cup (see overleaf) and Leagues Cup competition featuring Mexican and US sides.

Three Champions Cup places is certainly an improvement for the Caribbean, but this cannot disguise the fact that a region that supplies three quarters of CONCACAF's membership is vastly under-represented both in the elite competition and the confederation's political structure.

For the full Caribbean Club Shield & Caribbean Cup draws, see page 144.

Last year's Caribbean Club Shield winners... Puerto Rico's Bayamon
Credit: CONCACAF.com

Central America

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER

Central American Cup set to launch

Another new CONCACAF club tournament hopes to give a boost to football in the region

When CONCACAF decided to expand their main club tournament, the Champions League (now re-christened Champions Cup), they did it to fend off the competition of the upstart Leagues Cup, organised by the Mexican and United States FA's in an attempt to leverage the passion and wealth potential of the Mexican-American community in the US.

For a long time, CONCACAF has lived off the enthusiasm of the community, organising club and national competitions in American territory, with Mexican teams being the main cash cow. With their main source of revenue now under threat, they decided to expand the Champions League from 16 to 27 teams, including an expansion of Mexican and US clubs from four teams apiece to 15 in total.

However, as there are more countries in the region, the new format has also allowed for more participation from Central American countries, and thus, CONCACAF decided to do a makeover to their usual tournament for the region, the CONCACAF League, and create the new Central American Cup.

The CONCACAF Central American Cup will now be an annual continental club competition that will serve as the qualifying tournament for the

Contenders... Costa Rican giants Saprissa (L) and Alajuelense (R) will take part

Historic achievement... Deportivo Saprissa celebrate winning the CONCACAF Champions' Cup back in 2005

Honduran champions...Olimpia will be among the favourites for the inaugural competition

CONCACAF Champions Cup from Central America. The tournament format will be divided into a group phase and a knockout phase and will feature 20 teams representing all seven Central American Football Union members.

While it's true that the new competition is a by-product of the Champions Cup expansion, it does make sense from a sporting standpoint as well. It is no secret that Central American football has been going through a number of problems in the last few years. Most of the countries in the region have a latent talent crisis, which has seen them underperform both in the club and nations' regional and world competitions.

The last time a Central American club won the CONCACAF main tournament was 18 years ago, when Costa Rica's Deportivo Saprissa surprised the continent by beating Mexican powerhouses Pumas UNAM in the 2005 Champions League final. The *Morados* then went on to finish third in that year's Club World Cup (beaten by Liverpool in the semi-finals), which stood as the best position by a CONCACAF side until Mexico's Tigres UANL reached the final of the competition in February 2021.

Those good results marked the beginning of the "Golden Age" of Costa Rican football, which reached its climax in Brazil 2014, when the national team reached the World Cup quarter-finals, bowing out in a dramatic penalty shootout against a Netherlands team that went on to finish third in the competition. At the same time, Honduras managed to qualify twice for the World Cup, in 2010 and 2014, and Panama did so for the first time in Russia 2018.

The reality now is much grimmer. Despite a surprising (and undeserved) victory against Japan, Costa Rica were the only Central American side at Qatar 2022, and finished last in their group after losing 7-0 to Spain and 4-2 to Germany. The new generation doesn't seem to have the quality of the previous one, with legendary goalkeeper Keylor Navas, back at Paris Saint-Germain after a loan at Nottingham Forest, the only *Ticos* player in a top European league.

Honduras are in an even worse state. They finished bottom in the 2022 Qatar final qualifying group and didn't manage to get out of their group in the recent 2023 Gold Cup, trounced 4-0 by Mexico in the process. El Salvador also went out at the same stage and Nicaragua were expelled after fielding an ineligible player in the qualifiers. Only finalists Panama, and Guatemala, who reached the quarter-finals and have shown some improvement under coach Luis Fernando Tena, can look to the future with reasonable optimism.

> It is no secret that Central American football has been going through a number of problems in the last few years

On the club scene, the situation is even worse. No Central American club has come remotely close to repeating Saprissa's achievement, and it is now common place to see them bowing out in the early rounds of the Champions League to Mexican and American sides. In fact, there hasn't been a Central American team in the final since Saprissa reached it again in 2008, losing to Mexico's Pachuca.

It makes sense, therefore, to give more Central American sides the opportunity to play in a continental competition and the fact that there is a group stage will mean that each will play at least four matches, which will allow them to get more continental action than ever before.

For the 2023 edition, which will kick-off on August 1, the favourites will be the usual Central American powerhouses, Saprissa and Alajuelense (both Costa Rica), Olimpia (Honduras) and Comunicaciones (Guatemala). Six teams – the four quarter-final winners and two more from a play-off among the losers – will qualify for the CONCACAF Champions Cup, due to start in early 2024.

THE DRAW

GROUP A
- Deportivo Saprissa
- Coban Imperial
- Cartagines
- Universitario
- Jocoro

GROUP B
- Olimpia
- Xelaju
- Independiente
- FAS
- Real Esteli

GROUP C
- Comunicaciones
- Herediano
- Real Espana
- Aguila
- Diriangen

GROUP D
- Alajuelense
- Motagua
- Olancho
- Sporting San Miguelito
- Verdes

Oman

JOHN DUERDEN

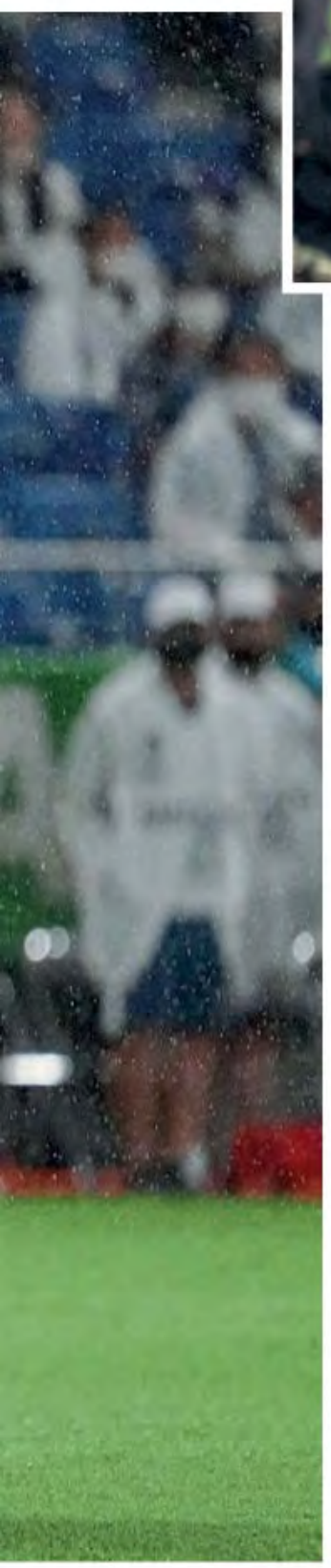
Oman on the up

With the 2023 Asian Cup on the horizon, Oman are heading in the right direction under head coach Branko Ivankovic

Australia pushed Argentina all the way when they met in the second round of the World Cup last December, losing 2-1 to the eventual champions. Yet it could have been Oman taking on Messi and Co in their own backyard on Arab soil – not that much would have had to have gone differently.

Had the Reds scored one more goal against China in November 2021 then they would have finished two points above the Socceroos in the final round of qualification instead of a point behind. They would have been expected to defeat the United Arab Emirates in Asia's play-off and would then have fancied their chances against Peru in very familiar conditions. After all, they went to Japan in the final round of qualification and won 1-0 in a result that certainly made many sit up

Head coach... Branko Ivankovic



World Cup qualifying shock...Oman players huddle before their upset win in Japan

and take notice; in Asia, the Samurai Blue rarely lose at home. Just getting to the World Cup for the first time would have been enough for Oman and anything else, including a knockout game with Argentina, would have been a lovely bonus.

To describe that as far-fetched is to overlook the good work that has been done in Oman in recent years, understandable though that is given the fact that the men from Muscat don't make many headlines even in their own region of the Middle East. Head coach Branko Ivankovic is also used to operating a little under the radar, but he has quite a CV when it comes to Asia. The Croatian led Iran to the 2006 World Cup and, as well as a couple of spells back home with Dinamo Zagreb, there were stints in China and Saudi Arabia plus a successful period in charge of Tehran titans Persepolis. Now, his best job could be taking Oman – for many years a pleasant mid-ranking team with the friendliest fans and officials in Asia – to become a continental power.

"We have worked hard but the important part is that the players want to learn and that we have support from the federation," Ivankovic told *World Soccer*. "We showed in qualification for the 2022 World Cup that we can match any team in Asia. We have improved a lot and we have to keep on that path."

The path is planned to lead all the way to North America in 2026 when Asia's automatic allocation increases from four to eight (Oman would have made it had there been the same number of berths in Qatar). First up is the Asian Cup in January. "For the first time, we were in the second pot of seeds and that shows the progress we have made."

After reaching the second round for the first time in the 2019 continental tournament, being drawn with Saudi Arabia, Kyrgyzstan and Thailand this year presents a challenge but nothing for Oman to be scared of. Preparations started with the Arabian Gulf Cup in January when a young team reached the final of the competition in Iraq, only to lose 3-2 to the hosts in a thrilling game in front of 60,000 delighted home fans. The Reds were also invited to the inaugural Central Asia Football Association (CAFA) Nations Cup in June where they finished third, losing to hosts Uzbekistan – in an uncharacteristically sloppy performance – but beating Turkmenistan and Asian Cup group opponents Kyrgyzstan along the way.

> "We showed in qualification for the 2022 World Cup that we can match any team in Asia"
>
> Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic

After three-and-a-half years, the challenge remaining for Ivankovic is not just to defeat the established powers of Asian football but to adapt to the new reality. "As we have improved and got better results, expectations have become higher at home," he said. "Other teams have also given us more respect and are starting to play differently against us." Oman caused problems for others with their well-refined counter-attacking style and well-drilled organisation. Becoming more proficient at taking the game to opponents that are more cautious is the next step and it is a natural one.

The national team would be better off with a better domestic competition. The country is, unlike a number of rivals and neighbours, not blessed with oil or gas reserves and almost limitless resources to spend on players, infrastructure and hosting massive events. The Oman Professional League is at a decent level but the level of foreign imports are not at the height of the likes of Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia. Work has been done on youth development, which has borne fruit, but attendances are low and more intensity would be welcome.

It means that the national team are leading the way and the direction is firmly towards North America 2026.

Missing out...Oman finished just a point behind Australia and a place in the 2022 World Cup play-offs

Georgia & Romania

LUKAS VRABLIK

Review

England win nail-biting final

Young Lions seal European Under-21 Championship in dramatic circumstances

It all came close to heartbreak. In the 98th minute of the European Under-21 Championship final in Batumi, Georgia, VAR told the referee Espen Eskas to check the duel between the Spanish striker Abel Ruiz and England centre-back Levi Colwill. After much deliberation, he pointed to the penalty spot – and England were in danger of losing their 1-0 lead. It could scarcely have been more nerve-wracking – for everyone except the man that mattered most.

"I knew I would save it. It was pretty easy really," James Trafford, England's goalkeeper, said after the game.

Trafford saved Ruiz's spot-kick, and then parried Aimar Oroz's follow-up, to ensure that England became European champions in the Under-21 category for the first time since 1984.

Trafford went to the tournament, co-hosted by Georgia and Romania, as a Manchester City player but spent last season in League One on loan at Bolton Wanderers. He could have been forgiven for taking his eye off the tournament while waiting for his transfer to Burnley to be confirmed, yet proved to be one of the winners' most consistent performers. In the long-term, he's one of the standout individuals with the potential to make the step up to the senior national team.

That, after all, is the main goal of England's youth development, with Gareth Southgate more than willing to promote impressive performers from the Under-21 side to the first team.

Led by former Everton midfielder Lee Carsley, the Under-21 squad included plenty of Premier League experience with the likes of Morgan Gibbs-White, Jacob Ramsey, Emile Smith Rowe, Curtis Jones and Player of the Tournament Anthony Gordon. A star-studded team

Champions... England captain Taylor Harwood-Bellis lifts the trophy

with plenty of individual quality, Carsley's side also has collective spirit, something that he highlighted several times during the tournament.

"We're like one big family, it's like a club," said the team's captain Taylor Harwood-Bellis of Manchester City. "We'll all celebrate together."

England played with confidence in the build-up and sliced through opponents thanks to their passing. Along the way, Trafford kept clean sheets in all six games, a competition first.

For England, the triumph of their U21 side serves as further proof of the FA's successful youth strategy, following on from the U17 World Cup (2017), U19 Euros (2017 and 2022) and U20 World Cup (in 2017).

This time, the winning goal was scored by Liverpool midfielder Curtis Jones, albeit somewhat curiously:

Final goalscorer ...Curtis Jones

Cole Palmer's free-kick deflected off him as he was standing near to the Spanish wall, and goalkeeper Arnau Tenas could not keep it out. The celebrations were followed by a tussle between the two dugouts, with England's assistant coach Ashley Cole and Spain's fitness coach Carlos Rivera both sent to the stands.

England had plenty of chances to put the final to bed, but Spain were no easy opponent, especially thanks to their pressing.

This wasn't as star-filled as the Spanish team of 2017, when a side featuring Hector Bellerin, Dani Ceballos, Marco Asensio, Marcos Llorente and Saul Niguez lost against Germany in the final. Pedri, Gavi and Ferran Torres weren't included after long club seasons, but Spain still had a lot of quality, even if there was only one player each from Barcelona (Tenas) and Real Madrid (Antonio Blanco).

Like England, Spain had several players with top-flight domestic experience, such as Gabri Veiga (Celta Vigo), Alex Baena (Villarreal), Aimor Oroz (Osasuna), Rodri (Real Betis) and Jon Pacheco (Real Sociedad), while four members of the squad have been capped at senior level – Ruiz, Blanco, Hugo Guillamon and Juan Miranda.

Trafford saved Ruiz's spot-kick, and then parried Aimar Oroz's follow-up, to ensure that England became European champions in the Under-21 category for the first time since 1984

Decisive...Abel Ruiz missed the dramatic late penalty

Santi Denia took over as coach in December, after the previous U21 boss Luis de la Fuente was promoted to the senior team to replace Luis Enrique. Denia won the U19 Euros in 2019, but he couldn't repeat the triumph with the older category. Spain remain the competition's joint-most successful country, reaching the final in five of the last seven editions and winning three, with five titles in total.

With England and Spain accounting for every member of the Team of the Tournament (six England, five Spain), the final was undoubtedly contested by the two best teams. But there were impressive performances elsewhere too.

The next generation of Israeli talent continued to impress, reaching the semi-finals in only their third appearance at this level. In June they reached the same stage of the U20 World Cup, and made it to the final of the U19 Euros last year, suggesting that the future is bright for the senior team, even if silverware continues to elude the youth sides.

In the other half of the draw, Ukraine's run to the semis (ended by a 5-1 loss to Spain) was inspired by three-goal Shakhtar midfielder Heorhiy Sudakov, who finished joint-top scorer with Ruiz and Manchester City's Sergio Gomez. The 20-year-old was particularly impressive when notching against Spain in the group stage, and a brace against a strong French side in the quarter-finals.

The other surprise came from co-hosts Georgia, who topped a group containing Portugal, the Netherlands and Belgium, before losing to Israel on penalties.

Madagascar

STEVE MENARY

Indian Ocean Island Games

The 2023 Games' football tournament provides a rare shot at silverware for island teams

Host stadium... Kianja Barea Mahamasina, Antananarivo

The football tournament at the Indian Ocean Games provides a low-profile but rare opportunity for the region's national teams to enjoy some success.

The Maldives were the original hosts for the 2023 edition before withdrawing in January 2021 and were replaced by Madagascar, who this summer dropped a number of sports due to lack of facilities including women's football and beach soccer.

Men's football was retained and will be staged across three venues in the capital Antananarivo: Kianja Barea Mahamasina, Vontovorona Stadium and Elgeco Plus By-pass. Reunion are holders and have won five of the ten tournaments staged since the first event on their home island in 1979.

For Reunion and another French overseas territory, Mayotte, the Games present a rare opportunity to play at representative level. Reunion is only an associate member of the Confederation of African Football so cannot compete in major international tournaments, while Mayotte's only affiliation is to the French Football Federation.

Mayotte have never even reached the final, but were third at the last tournament in Mauritius and could be contenders this year after expanding their selection.

"We [have] got a super team now because before [we weren't] allowed to pick [our] best players in Europe. This year that's what [we] did and our team are really good – we [are] going to be the surprise," says Ida-Yasser Mze, who plays as a winger for Veyrier Sports in France's fifth tier.

Mayotte coach Abidi Massoundi's squad can only draw from overseas lower leagues as the tournament from August 23 to September 3 is not staged in an official FIFA international window. Guillaume Brouste, technical director at the Ligue Mahoraise de Football, explains: "No clubs would let their players leave at the end of August or beginning of September to participate in a regional level tournament."

> For Reunion and another French overseas territory, Mayotte, the Games present a rare opportunity to play at representative level

That is one of the reasons for the low status of the Games. Reunion – winners of gold in three of the last four tournaments – have a professional league to draw from and will be favourites yet again.

Host nation... Madagascar's team line up at January's African Nations Championship

Hosts Madagascar won in 1990 and 1993 but last reached the final in 2007. Romuald "Roro" Rakotondrabe, who was appointed to coach Madagascar's Indian Ocean team, then handed the senior team role in May after Nicolas Dupuis' departure, will also rely on local players.

Mohamed Bouhari landed both jobs in June 2022 in the Comoros, who have never reached a Games final. "It is through the [Games] that local players will gain respect. I also hope that means they will be released [by their clubs] so that we can benefit from very good preparation," Bouhari told *Comorosfootball.com*.

Mauritius have won twice and as hosts reached the last final, but football has been massively disrupted on the island by the COVID-19 pandemic and Fidy Rasoanaivo, who also coaches local side AS Port Louis, is also likely to be denied overseas players. The Maldives have only entered three times previously and are sitting out again this year.

The Seychelles are the only other one of the seven competitors to win, back in 2011 as hosts, when former Fulham striker Kevin Betsy returned to represent the land of his father at the end of his career. In a fairy-tale ending, Betsy scored in the penalty shootout to secure the Seychelles' first and so far only gold medal.

There will not be many players with Betsy's experience in Madagascar, but gold will still represent a major triumph for the 2023 winners.

AUGUST 4-SEPTEMBER 1

Global diary

Games and dates to pencil in for the month ahead

Women's World Cup

The final stages of the 2023 finals swing into action on Saturday, August 5, followed by two weeks of tense knockout action. The semi-finals take place on the 15th and 16th, with the final following on Sunday, August 20 in Sydney.

Up for grabs... the Women's World Cup trophy

The big kick-offs

The weekend of August 12 is the key date for your diary, as the Premier League, La Liga and Ligue 1 all get underway for the 2023-24 season, as do the Dutch Eredivisie, Turkish Super Lig and Portuguese Primeira Liga campaigns. A week later, Germany's Bundesliga and Italy's Serie A also begin.

Champions League

The final line-up of this season's Champions League group stage will be decided at the end of August. The third round of qualifying begins on August 8, with the second legs following a week later, and the play-offs another week after that. The play-off round draw takes place on August 7, with Young Boys and Antwerp – the champions of Switzerland and Belgium respectively – already secured of a play-off spot. The group stage draw is on August 31, the day after the remaining second-leg play-offs.

Copa crunch time

By the end of August, the 2023 Copa Libertadores will be down to the final four teams. Each team's path to the final has already been laid out, with the last-16 matches taking place in the first two weeks of the month, and the quarter-finals following on August 22-24 and 29-31. With five teams present in the knockout rounds, another Brazilian winner is the likeliest result.

Crunch time... action from this season's Libertadores group stage

5 unmissable matches

- **Monza v Milan, August 8**
  The Silvio Berlusconi Trophy game will carry extra poignancy this year with it taking place so soon after the passing of both clubs' former owner. The clash will be an annual event, with this year's inaugural contest taking place at Monza's home stadium.

- **Burnley v Manchester City, August 11**
  All eyes will be on the Turf Moor dugout as Burnley boss Vincent Kompany takes on his old club in his first game as a Premier League manager.

- **Bayern Munich v RB Leipzig, August 12**
  In last year's German Super Cup, these two sides served up an absolute treat, with Bayern winning 5-3. A repeat would be the perfect appetiser for the new Bundesliga campaign.

Goal fest...Jamal Musiala scores in last season's German Super Cup for Bayern Munich

- **Manchester City v Sevilla, August 16**
  This year's UEFA Super Cup takes place at the Karaiskakis Stadium in Piraeus, Greece, home of Olympiakos. Manchester City have never competed for the trophy before, while Sevilla have lost a record five finals.

- **Paris Saint-Germain v Lens, August 26**
  Last season's top two teams go head-to-head early in the new Ligue 1 campaign. Both will be much-changed from their last meeting, but this clash should give a good indication of how the two will fair this season.

PSG v Lens...early title six-pointer?

2023 CONCACAF GOLD CUP

CANADA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Dayne **ST CLAIR**	(26) 09/05/97	Minnesota United (USA)
16	Tom **McGILL**	(23) 25/03/00	Brighton (Eng)
18	Milan **BORJAN**	(35) 23/10/87	Red Star Belgrade (Srb)
24	*Jonathan **SIROIS***	*(21) 27/06/01*	*CF Montreal*

DEFENDERS

2	Zachary **BRAULT-GUILLARD**	(24) 30/12/98	CF Montreal
4	Kamal **MILLER**	(26) 16/05/97	Inter Miami (USA)
5	Steven **VITORIA**	(36) 11/01/87	Chaves (Por)
6	Dominick **ZATOR**	(28) 18/09/94	Korona Kielce (Pol)
14	Moise **BOMBITO**	(23) 30/03/00	Colorado Rapids (USA)
15	Zac **McGRAW**	(26) 08/06/97	Portland Timbers (USA)
22	Richie **LARYEA**	(28) 07/01/95	Toronto FC
23	Scott **KENNEDY**	(26) 31/03/97	Jahn Regensburg (Ger)

MIDFIELDERS

3	Liam **FRASER**	(25) 13/02/98	Deinze (Bel)
8	David **WOTHERSPOON**	(33) 16/01/90	St Johnstone (Sco)
12	Victor **LOTURI**	(22) 21/05/01	Ross County (Sco)
20	Ali **AHMED**	(22) 10/10/00	Vancouver Whitecaps
21	Jonathan **OSORIO**	(31) 12/06/92	Toronto FC

FORWARDS

7	Jayden **NELSON**	(20) 26/09/02	Rosenborg (Nor)
9	Lucas **CAVALLINI**	(30) 28/12/92	Tijuana (Mex)
10	Junior **HOILETT**	(33) 05/06/90	Reading (Eng)
11	Liam **MILLAR**	(23) 27/09/99	Basel (Sui)
13	Jacob **SHAFFELBURG**	(23) 26/11/99	Nashville SC (USA)
17	Jacen **RUSSELL-ROWE**	(20) 13/09/02	Columbus Crew (USA)
19	Charles-Andreas **BRYM**	(24) 08/08/98	FC Eindhoven (Ned)

COACH

John **HERDMAN** (Eng) (47) 19/07/75

COSTA RICA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jussef **DELGADO**	(29) 27/01/94	Perez Zeledon
18	Kevin **CHAMORRO**	(23) 08/04/00	Deportivo Saprissa
23	Alexandre **LEZCANO**	(21) 26/08/01	Santos de Guapiles

DEFENDERS

2	Carlos **MARTINEZ**	(24) 30/03/99	Alajuelense
3	Juan Pablo **VARGAS**	(28) 06/06/95	Millonarios (Col)
4	Keysher **FULLER**	(28) 12/07/94	Herediano
6	Pablo **ARBOINE**	(25) 03/04/98	Deportivo Saprissa
13	Suhander **ZUNIGA**	(26) 15/01/97	Alajuelense
15	Francisco **CALVO**	(30) 08/07/92	Konyaspor (Tur)
19	Kendall **WASTON**	(35) 01/01/88	Deportivo Saprissa
22	Jefry **VALVERDE**	(28) 10/06/95	Deportivo Saprissa

MIDFIELDERS

5	Celso **BORGES**	(35) 27/05/88	Alajuelense
8	Josimar **ALCOCER**	(18) 07/07/04	Alajuelense
10	Cristopher **NUNEZ**	(25) 08/12/97	Lamia (Gre)
11	Aaron **SUAREZ**	(20) 27/06/02	Alajuelense
14	Ricardo **PENA**	(18) 15/07/04	Real Betis B (Spa)
16	Warren **MADRIGAL**	(18) 24/07/04	Deportivo Saprissa
17	Carlos **MORA**	(22) 18/03/01	Alajuelense
25	*Kenneth **VARGAS***	*(21) 17/04/02*	*Herediano*
20	Wilmer **AZOFEIFA**	(29) 04/06/94	San Carlos
21	Roan **WILSON**	(21) 01/05/02	Gil Vicente (Por)
24	*Yeltsin **TEJEDA***	*(32) 17/03/92*	*Herediano*

FORWARDS

7	Anthony **CONTRERAS**	(23) 29/01/00	Herediano
9	Diego **CAMPOS**	(27) 01/10/95	Degerfors IF (Swe)
12	Joel **CAMPBELL**	(30) 26/06/92	Alajuelense

COACH

Luis Fernando **SUAREZ** (Col) (63) 23/12/59

CUBA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Sandy **SANCHEZ**	(29) 24/05/94	Atletico Pantoja (Dom)
12	Raiko **AROZARENA**	(26) 27/03/97	Tampa Bay Rowdies (USA)
21	Nelson **JOHNSTON**	(33) 25/02/90	Jicaral (Crc)

DEFENDERS

2	Modesto **MENDEZ**	(25) 06/01/98	Inter Miami II (USA)
3	Mario **PENALVER**	(20) 06/01/03	Deportivo Mixco (Gua)
4	**CAVAFE**	(24) 25/04/99	Dornbirn (Aut)
5	Dariel **MOREJON**	(24) 21/12/98	Santa Ana (Crc)
6	Yosel **PIEDRA**	(29) 27/03/94	San Carlos (Crc)
13	Jorge **CORRALES**	(32) 20/05/91	FC Tulsa (USA)
16	Jassael **HERRERA**	(21) 01/01/02	Cienfuegos

MIDFIELDERS

8	Eduardo **HERNANDEZ**	(20) 18/02/03	Santiago de Cuba
10	Arichel **HERNANDEZ**	(29) 20/09/93	Deportivo Mixco (Gua)
11	Romario **TORREZ**	(18) 09/02/05	Artemisa
14	Neisser **SANDO**	(24) 26/10/98	Cienfuegos
15	Yunior **PEREZ**	(22) 12/03/01	Santa Lucia (Gua)
19	Denilson **MILANES**	(20) 16/12/02	Desamparados (Crc)
22	Roberney **CABALLERO**	(27) 02/11/95	La Habana

FORWARDS

7	Willian **POZO-VENTA**	(25) 27/08/97	KTP (Fin)
9	Maikel **REYES**	(30) 04/03/93	Municipal Jalapa (Nca)
17	Daniel **DIAZ**	(29) 27/03/94	San Carlos (Crc)
18	Yasniel **MATOS**	(21) 29/03/02	Municipal (Gua)
20	Aldair **RUIZ**	(25) 13/11/97	Europa (Gib)
23	Luis **PARADELA**	(26) 21/01/97	Deportivo Saprissa (Crc)

COACH

Pablo **SANCHEZ** (65) 19/12/57

EL SALVADOR

GOALKEEPERS

1	Mario **GONZALEZ**	(26) 20/05/97	Alianza
18	Tomas **ROMERO**	(22) 19/12/00	Toronto FC (Can)
22	Oscar **PLEITEZ**	(30) 06/02/93	Isidro Metapan

DEFENDERS

2	Erick **CABALCETA**	(30) 09/01/93	Alajuelense (Crc)
3	Roberto **DOMINGUEZ**	(26) 09/05/97	FAS
4	Eriq **ZAVALETA**	(30) 02/08/92	LA Galaxy (USA)
5	Ronald **RODRIGUEZ**	(24) 22/09/98	Aguila
12	William **CANALES**	(28) 18/02/95	Alianza
15	Alex **ROLDAN**	(26) 28/07/96	Seattle Sounders (USA)
20	Nelson **BLANCO**	(23) 17/08/99	North Carolina FC (USA)
21	Bryan **TAMACAS**	(28) 21/02/95	Oakland Roots (USA)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Narciso **ORELLANA**	(28) 28/01/95	Alianza
8	Brayan **LANDAVERDE**	(28) 27/05/95	FAS
13	Leonardo **MENJIVAR**	(21) 24/10/01	Chalatenango
14	Christian **MARTINEZ**	(28) 12/08/94	San Carlos (Crc)
16	Harold **OSORIO**	(19) 20/08/03	Chicago Fire (USA)
17	Jairo **HENRIQUEZ**	(29) 31/08/93	Colorado Springs Switchbacks (USA)
23	Melvin **CARTAGENA**	(23) 30/07/99	Aguila

FORWARDS

7	Joshua **PEREZ**	(25) 21/01/98	Montevarchi (Ita)
9	Brayan **GIL**	(21) 28/06/01	Tolima (Col)
10	Mayer **GIL**	(19) 07/09/03	Alianza Petrolera (Col)
11	Cristian **GIL**	(26) 05/11/96	FAS
19	Kevin **REYES**	(23) 28/08/99	FAS

COACH

Hugo **PEREZ** (59) 08/11/63

GUADELOUPE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Willy **LEGUIER**	(26) 17/12/96	Phare Petit-Canal
16	Brice **COGNARD**	(33) 26/04/90	Avranches (Fra)
23	Davy **ROUYARD**	(23) 17/08/99	Bordeaux (Fra)

DEFENDERS

2	Mickael **ALPHONSE**	(33) 12/07/89	Ajaccio (Fra)
3	Andreaw **GRAVILLON**	(25) 08/02/98	Torino (Ita)
4	Ronan **HAUTERVILLE**	(33) 21/11/89	Phare Petit-Canal
5	Nathanael **SAINTINI**	(23) 30/05/00	Sion (Sui)
13	Cedric **AVINEL**	(36) 11/09/86	Ajaccio (Fra)
17	Anthony **BARON**	(30) 29/12/92	Servette (Sui)
19	Meddy **LINA**	(37) 11/01/86	Solidarite-Scolaire
20	Stevenson **CASIMIR**	(31) 03/06/92	La Gauloise

MIDFIELDERS

6	Quentin **ANNETTE**	(25) 13/01/98	Solidarite-Scolaire
7	Johan **ROTSEN**	(26) 11/08/96	Sete (Fra)
8	Ange-Freddy **PLUMAIN**	(28) 02/03/95	Bnei Sakhnin (Isr)
15	Jordan **LEBORGNE**	(27) 29/09/95	Versailles (Fra)
18	Steve **SOLVET**	(27) 20/03/96	Orleans (Fra)

FORWARDS

9	Thierry **AMBROSE**	(26) 28/03/97	Oostende (Bel)
10	Matthias **PHAETON**	(23) 08/01/00	CSKA Sofia (Bul)
11	Jordan **TELL**	(26) 10/06/97	Grenoble (Fra)
12	Steven **DAVIDAS**	(31) 17/03/92	La Gauloise
14	Vikash **TILLE**	(25) 26/11/97	Moulien
21	Luther **ARCHIMEDE**	(23) 17/09/99	Sacramento Republic (USA)
22	Dimitri **RAMOTHE**	(32) 08/09/90	Amical Club

COACH

Jocelyn **ANGLOMA** (57) 07/08/65

GUATEMALA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Nicholas **HAGEN**	(26) 02/08/96	HamKam (Nor)
12	Ricardo **JEREZ**	(37) 04/02/86	Chattanooga Red Wolves (USA)
21	Fredy **PEREZ**	(28) 09/12/94	Comunicaciones

DEFENDERS

2	Jose **ARDON**	(23) 20/01/00	Antigua
3	Nicolas **SAMAYOA**	(27) 02/08/95	Comunicaciones
4	Jose Carlos **PINTO**	(30) 16/06/93	Comunicaciones
7	Aaron **HERRERA**	(26) 06/06/97	CF Montreal (Can)
16	Jose **MORALES**	(26) 03/12/96	Municipal
20	Gerardo **GORDILLO**	(28) 17/08/94	Juventude (Bra)
22	Stheven **ROBLES**	(27) 12/11/95	Comunicaciones

MIDFIELDERS

5	Pedro **ALTAN**	(26) 04/06/97	Municipal
6	Carlos **MEJIA**	(31) 13/11/91	Antigua
8	Rodrigo **SARAVIA**	(30) 22/02/93	Comunicaciones
10	Antonio **LOPEZ**	(26) 10/04/97	Comunicaciones
13	Alejandro **GALINDO**	(31) 05/03/92	Municipal
15	Marlon **SEQUEN**	(30) 23/06/93	Municipal
17	Oscar **CASTELLANOS**	(23) 18/01/00	Antigua
23	Jorge **APARICIO**	(30) 21/11/92	Comunicaciones

FORWARDS

9	Rubio **RUBIN**	(27) 01/03/96	Real Salt Lake (USA)
11	Cesar **ARCHILA**	(29) 30/07/93	Municipal
14	Darwin **LOM**	(25) 14/07/97	Xelaju
18	Nathaniel **MENDEZ-LAING**	(31) 15/04/92	Derby County (Eng)
19	Esteban **GARCIA**	(25) 06/03/98	Mixco

COACH

Luis Fernando **TENA** (Mex) (65) 20/01/58

HAITI

GOALKEEPERS

1	Alexandre **PIERRE**	(22) 25/02/01	Strasbourg (Fra)
12	Josue **DUVERGER**	(23) 27/04/00	Santarem (Por)
23	Garissone **INNOCENT**	(23) 16/04/00	Eupen (Bel)

DEFENDERS

2	Carlens **ARCUS**	(26) 28/06/96	Vitesse (Ned)
4	Ricardo **ADE**	(33) 21/05/90	LDU Quito (Ecu)
5	Djimy **ALEXIS**	(25) 08/10/97	Hapoel Petah Tikva (Isr)
6	Garven **METUSALA**	(23) 31/12/99	Forge FC (Can)
10	Wilde-Donald **GUERRIER**	(34) 31/03/89	Zira (Aze)
15	Steven **SEANCE**	(31) 20/02/92	Sedan (Fra)
22	Alex Junior **CHRISTIAN**	(30) 12/05/93	Telavi (Geo)

MIDFIELDERS

3	Jeppe **SIMONSEN**	(27) 21/11/95	Podbeskidzie (Pol)
8	Leverton **PIERRE**	(25) 09/03/98	Dunkerque (Fra)
17	Danley Jean **JACQUES**	(23) 20/05/00	Metz (Fra)
18	Carl Fred **SAINTE**	(20) 09/08/02	North Texas SC (USA)
19	Steeven **SABA**	(30) 24/02/93	Violette
21	Bryan **ALCEUS**	(27) 01/02/96	Olympiakos Nicosia (Cyp)

FORWARDS

7	Carnejy **ANTOINE**	(31) 27/07/91	Hapoel Haifa (Isr)
9	Duckens **NAZON**	(29) 07/04/94	CSKA Sofia (Bul)
11	Derrick **ETIENNE**	(26) 25/11/96	Atlanta United (USA)
13	Jayro **JEAN**	(25) 22/06/98	Real Santa Cruz (Bol)
14	Fafa **PICAULT**	(32) 23/02/91	Nashville SC (USA)
16	Mondy **PRUNIER**	(23) 22/12/99	Versailles (Fra)
20	Frantzdy **PIERROT**	(28) 29/03/95	Maccabi Haifa (Isr)

COACH

Gabriel Calderon **PELLEGRINO** (Spa) (36) 30/10/1986

HONDURAS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Edrick **MENJIVAR**	(30) 01/03/93	Olimpia
18	Harold **FONSECA**	(29) 08/10/93	Olancho
22	Luis **LOPEZ**	(29) 13/09/93	Real Espana

DEFENDERS

2	Devron **GARCIA**	(27) 17/02/96	Real Espana
3	Wesly **DECAS**	(23) 11/08/99	Motagua
4	Marcelo **SANTOS**	(30) 02/08/92	Motagua
13	Maylor **NUNEZ**	(26) 05/07/96	Olimpia
15	Luis **VEGA**	(21) 28/02/02	Motagua
19	Omar **ELVIR**	(33) 28/11/89	Olancho
23	Franklin **FLORES**	(27) 18/05/96	Real Espana

MIDFIELDERS

5	Christian **ALTAMIRANO**	(33) 26/11/89	Olancho
6	Bryan **ACOSTA**	(29) 24/11/93	Colorado Rapids (USA)
8	Joseph **ROSALES**	(22) 06/11/00	Minnesota United (USA)
10	Alexander **LOPEZ**	(31) 05/06/92	Alajuelense (Crc)
14	Jorge **ALVAREZ**	(25) 28/01/98	Olimpia
17	Jose **PINTO**	(25) 27/09/97	Olimpia
20	Deiby **FLORES**	(27) 16/06/96	Fehervar (Hun)
21	Alexy **VEGA**	(26) 16/09/96	Victoria

FORWARDS

7	Alberth **ELIS**	(27) 12/02/96	Brest (Fra)
9	Rubilio **CASTILLO**	(31) 26/11/91	Nantong Zhiyun (Chn)
11	Jerry **BENGTSON**	(36) 08/04/87	Olimpia
12	Jorge **BENGUCHE**	(27) 21/05/96	Olimpia
16	Edwin **SOLANO**	(27) 25/01/96	Olimpia

COACH

Diego **VAZQUEZ** (Arg) (51) 03/07/71

JAMAICA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Andre **BLAKE**	(32) 21/11/90	Philadelphia Union (USA)
13	Coniah **BOYCE-CLARKE**	(20) 01/03/03	Reading (Eng)
23	Jahmali **WAITE**	(24) 24/12/98	Pittsburgh Riverhounds (USA)

DEFENDERS

2	Dexter **LEMBIKISA**	(19) 04/11/03	Wolves (Eng)
4	Amari'i **BELL**	(29) 05/05/94	Luton Town (Eng)
5	Ethan **PINNOCK**	(30) 29/05/93	Brentford (Eng)
6	Di'Shon **BERNARD**	(22) 14/10/00	Portsmouth (Eng)
17	Damion **LOWE**	(30) 05/05/93	Philadelphia Union (USA)
19	Adrian **MARIAPPA**	(36) 03/10/86	Salford City (Eng)
20	Kemar **LAWRENCE**	(30) 17/09/92	Minnesota United (USA)
21	Javain **BROWN**	(24) 09/03/99	Vancouver Whitecaps (Can)

MIDFIELDERS

3	Kevon **LAMBERT**	(26) 22/03/97	Phoenix Rising (USA)
8	Daniel **JOHNSON**	(30) 08/10/92	Preston North End (Eng)
10	Bobby **DECORDOVA-REID**	(30) 02/02/93	Fulham (Eng)
15	Joel **LATIBEAUDIERE**	(23) 06/01/00	Swansea City (Wal)
16	Kaheem **PARRIS**	(23) 06/01/00	Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr)
22	Jon **RUSSELL**	(22) 09/10/00	Barnsley (Eng)

FORWARDS

7	Leon **BAILEY**	(25) 09/08/97	Aston Villa (Eng)
9	Cory **BURKE**	(31) 28/12/91	New York Red Bulls (USA)
11	Shamar **NICHOLSON**	(26) 16/02/97	Spartak Moscow (Rus)
12	Demarai **GRAY**	(26) 28/06/96	Everton (Eng)
14	Dujuan **RICHARDS**	(17) 11/10/05	Phoenix All Stars
18	Michail **ANTONIO**	(33) 28/03/90	West Ham United (Eng)

COACH

Heimir **HALLGRIMSSON** (Isl) (56) 10/06/67

MARTINIQUE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Theo **DE PERCIN**	(22) 01/02/01	Auxerre (Fra)
16	Yannis **CLEMENTIA**	(25) 05/07/97	Caen (Fra)
23	Emmanuel **VERMIGNON**	(34) 20/01/89	Club Colonial

DEFENDERS

2	Yordan **THIMON**	(26) 10/09/96	Golden Lion
3	Evan **SALINES**	(25) 26/03/98	Golden Lion
4	Davy **SINGAMA**	(22) 21/01/01	Golden Lion
5	Jean-Claude **MICHALET**	(23) 08/04/00	Golden Lion
7	Ronny **LABONNE**	(25) 14/09/97	Nimes (Fra)
15	Patrick **BURNER**	(27) 11/04/96	Nimes (Fra)
18	Jonathan **RIVIEREZ**	(34) 18/05/89	Bourg-Peronnas (Fra)
21	Florian **LAPIS**	(29) 08/08/93	Versailles (Fra)
22	Florent **POULOLO**	(26) 02/02/97	Sigma Olomouc (Cze)

MIDFIELDERS

6	Jonathan **MEXIQUE**	(28) 10/03/95	Chateauroux (Fra)
8	Andy **MARNY**	(27) 16/07/95	Club Colonial
11	Thomas **EPHESTION**	(28) 09/06/95	Mezokovesdi (Hun)
14	Cyril **MANDOUKI**	(31) 21/08/91	Paris FC (Fra)
19	Daniel **HERELLE**	(34) 17/10/88	Samaritaine
20	Ghislain **ARBAUT**	(23) 16/08/99	Assaut

FORWARDS

9	Stevyne **BAKER**	(22) 17/01/01	Diamantinoise
10	Brighton **LABEAU**	(27) 01/01/96	Lausanne-Sport (Sui)
12	Enrick **REUPERNE**	(24) 03/08/98	Assaut
13	Kevin **FORTUNE**	(33) 06/08/89	Orleans (Fra)
17	Karl **FABIEN**	(22) 01/08/00	Vierzon (Fra)

COACH

Marc **COLLAT** (73) 24/05/50

MEXICO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jose Antonio **RODRIGUEZ**	(30) 04/07/92	Tijuana
12	Luis **MALAGON**	(26) 02/03/97	America
13	Guillermo **OCHOA**	(37) 13/07/85	Salernitana (Ita)

DEFENDERS

2	Julian **ARAUJO**	(21) 13/08/01	Barcelona B (Spa)
3	Cesar **MONTES**	(26) 24/02/97	Espanyol (Spa)
5	Johan **VASQUEZ**	(24) 22/10/98	Cremonese (Ita)
6	Gerardo **ARTEAGA**	(24) 07/09/98	Genk (Bel)
19	Jorge **SANCHEZ**	(25) 10/12/97	Ajax (Ned)
21	Israel **REYES**	(23) 23/05/00	America
22	Victor **GUZMAN**	(21) 07/03/02	Monterrey
23	Jesus **GALLARDO**	(28) 15/08/94	Monterrey

MIDFIELDERS

4	Edson **ALVAREZ**	(25) 24/10/97	Ajax (Ned)
7	Luis **ROMO**	(28) 05/06/95	Monterrey
8	Carlos **RODRIGUEZ**	(26) 03/01/97	Cruz Azul
16	Diego **LAINEZ**	(23) 09/06/00	Tigres UANL
17	Orbelin **PINEDA**	(27) 24/03/96	AEK Athens (Gre)
18	Luis **CHAVEZ**	(27) 15/01/96	Pachuca

FORWARDS

9	Ozziel **HERRERA**	(22) 25/05/01	Atlas
10	Roberto **ALVARADO**	(24) 07/09/98	Chivas Guadalajara
11	Santiago **GIMENEZ**	(22) 18/04/01	Feyenoord (Ned)
14	Erick **SANCHEZ**	(23) 27/09/99	Pachuca
15	Uriel **ANTUNA**	(25) 21/08/97	Cruz Azul
20	Henry **MARTIN**	(30) 18/11/92	America

COACH

Jaime **LOZANO** (44) 29/09/78

PANAMA

GOALKEEPERS

1	Luis **MEJIA**	(32) 16/03/91	Union Espanola (Chi)
12	Cesar **SAMUDIO**	(29) 26/03/94	Marathon (Hon)
22	Orlando **MOSQUERA**	(28) 25/12/94	Monagas (Ven)

DEFENDERS

2	Cesar **BLACKMAN**	(25) 02/04/98	DAC (Svk)
25	*Ivan **ANDERSON***	*(25) 24/11/97*	*Monagas (Ven)*
3	Harold **CUMMINGS**	(31) 01/03/92	Monagas (Ven)
4	Fidel **ESCOBAR**	(28) 09/01/95	Deportivo Saprissa (Crc)
5	Roderick **MILLER**	(31) 03/04/92	Turan Tovuz (Aze)
14	Eduardo **ANDERSON**	(22) 31/01/01	San Carlos (Crc)
15	Eric **DAVIS**	(32) 31/03/91	DAC (Svk)
16	Andres **ANDRADE**	(24) 16/10/98	Arminia Bielefeld (Ger)
23	Michael Amir **MURILLO**	(27) 11/02/96	Anderlecht (Bel)
24	*Omar **VALENCIA***	*(19) 08/06/04*	*New York Red Bulls II (USA)*

MIDFIELDERS

6	Cristian **MARTINEZ**	(26) 06/02/97	Najran (KSA)
7	Jovani **WELCH**	(23) 07/12/99	Academico de Viseu (Por)
8	Adalberto **CARRASQUILLA**	(24) 28/11/98	Houston Dynamo (USA)
10	Yoel **BARCENAS**	(29) 23/10/93	Mazatlan (Mex)
13	Freddy **GONDOLA**	(27) 18/09/95	Alajuelense (Crc)
19	Alberto **QUINTERO**	(35) 18/12/87	Cienciano (Per)
20	Anibal **GODOY**	(33) 10/02/90	Nashville SC (USA)
21	Cesar **YANIS**	(27) 28/01/96	Potros del Este

FORWARDS

9	Azarias **LONDONO**	(22) 21/06/01	Comunicaciones (Gua)
11	Ismael **DIAZ**	(26) 12/05/97	Universidad Catolica (Ecu)
17	Jose **FAJARDO**	(29) 18/08/93	Cusco (Per)
18	Cecilio **WATERMAN**	(32) 13/04/91	Cobresal (Chi)

COACH

Thomas **CHRISTIANSEN** (Den) (50) 11/03/73

QATAR

GOALKEEPERS

1	Salah **ZAKARIA**	(24) 24/04/99	Al Duhail
21	Yousef **HASSAN**	(27) 24/05/96	Al Gharafa
22	Meshaal **BARSHAM**	(25) 14/02/98	Al Sadd

DEFENDERS

2	Ahmed **SUHAIL**	(24) 08/02/99	Al Arabi
3	Hazem **SHEHATA**	(25) 02/02/98	Al Wakrah
4	Yousef **AYMAN**	(24) 21/03/99	Al Duhail
5	Tarek **SALMAN**	(25) 05/12/97	Al Sadd
13	Musab **KHEDER**	(29) 26/09/93	Al Sadd
14	Homam **AHMED**	(23) 25/08/99	Al Gharafa
15	Bassam **AL RAWI**	(25) 16/12/97	Al Duhail
20	Jassem **GABER**	(21) 20/02/02	Al Arabi

MIDFIELDERS

6	Ahmed **FATEHI**	(30) 25/01/93	Al Arabi
7	Mahdi **SALEM**	(19) 04/04/04	Al Sadd
8	Ali **ASSADALLA**	(30) 19/01/93	Al Sadd
10	Mohammed **WAAD**	(23) 18/09/99	Al Sadd
12	Abdullah **MARAFEE**	(31) 13/04/92	Al Arabi
16	Mostafa **MESHAAL**	(22) 28/03/01	Al Shamal
23	Assim **MADIBO**	(26) 22/10/96	Al Duhail

FORWARDS

9	Mohammed **MUNTARI**	(29) 20/12/93	Al Duhail
11	Yusuf **ABDURISAG**	(23) 06/08/99	Al Wakrah
17	Tameem **AL ABDULLAH**	(20) 05/10/02	Al Rayyan
18	Khalid **MUNEER**	(25) 24/02/98	Al Wakrah
19	Almoez **ALI**	(26) 19/08/96	Al Duhail

COACH

Carlos **QUEIROZ** (Por) (70) 01/03/53

SAINT KITTS & NEVIS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Jamal **JEFFERS**	(30) 23/03/93	St. Paul's United
18	Julani **ARCHIBALD**	(32) 18/05/91	Lorca Deportiva (Spa)
23	Xander **PARKE**	(19) 17/11/03	Shrewsbury Town (Eng)

DEFENDERS

2	Malique **ROBERTS**	(21) 01/08/01	Cayon Rockets
3	Gerard **WILLIAMS**	(35) 04/06/88	TRAU (Ind)
4	Andre **BURLEY**	(23) 10/09/99	Oxford City (Eng)
5	Jameel **IBLE**	(29) 26/11/93	Guiseley (Eng)
6	Lois **MAYNARD**	(34) 22/01/89	Oldham Athletic (Eng)
12	Dihjorn **SIMMONDS**	(24) 02/11/98	Cayon Rockets
13	Ezrick **NICHOLLS**	(23) 13/09/99	University of Tampa (USA)
20	Raheem **HANLEY**	(29) 24/02/94	Stalybridge Celtic (Eng)

MIDFIELDERS

8	Yohannes **MITCHUM**	(25) 06/04/98	Newtown United
11	Tyquan **TERRELL**	(25) 16/04/98	St. Peter's
14	Raheem **SOMERSALL**	(25) 05/07/97	North Carolina FC (USA)
15	Mervin **LEWIS**	(22) 26/08/00	Cayon Rockets
19	Romaine **SAWYERS**	(31) 02/11/91	Cardiff City (Wal)
22	Ronaldo **BELGROVE**	(24) 15/09/98	Miami City (USA)

FORWARDS

7	Tiquanny **WILLIAMS**	(21) 10/09/01	Old Road Jets
9	Carlos **BERTIE**	(27) 10/09/95	Cayon Rockets
10	Jacob **HAZEL**	(29) 15/04/94	Darlington (Eng)
16	Keithroy **FREEMAN**	(29) 16/10/93	St. Paul's United
17	Rowan **LIBURD**	(30) 28/08/92	Ramsgate (Eng)
21	Omari **STERLING-JAMES**	(29) 15/09/93	Ebbsfleet United (Eng)

COACH

Austin **HUGGINS** (53) 19/01/70

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

GOALKEEPERS

1	Marvin **PHILLIP**	(38) 01/08/84	Port of Spain
21	Nicklas **FRENDERUP**	(30) 14/12/92	Ranheim (Nor)
22	Denzil **SMITH**	(23) 12/10/99	W Connection

DEFENDERS

2	Aubrey **DAVID**	(32) 11/10/90	Aucas (Ecu)
4	Sheldon **BATEAU**	(32) 29/01/91	Beveren (Bel)
5	Leland **ARCHER**	(27) 08/01/96	Charleston Battery (USA)
6	Luke **SINGH**	(22) 12/09/00	Atletico Ottawa (Can)
12	Kareem **MOSES**	(33) 11/02/90	FF Jaro (Fin)
14	Shannon **GOMEZ**	(26) 05/10/96	San Antonio FC (USA)
16	Alvin **JONES**	(28) 09/07/94	Club Sando
18	Triston **HODGE**	(28) 09/10/94	Hartford Athletic (USA)

MIDFIELDERS

3	Joevin **JONES**	(31) 03/08/91	Police
8	Ajani **FORTUNE**	(20) 30/12/02	Atlanta United (USA)
10	Kevin **MOLINO**	(33) 17/06/90	Columbus Crew (USA)
15	Neveal **HACKSHAW**	(27) 21/11/95	Oakland Roots SC (USA)
17	Andre **RAMPERSAD**	(28) 02/02/95	HFX Wanderers (Can)
23	Molik Jesse **KHAN**	(19) 08/04/04	Minnesota United 2 (USA)

FORWARDS

7	Ryan **TELFER**	(29) 04/03/94	Miami FC (USA)
9	Kadeem **CORBIN**	(27) 03/03/96	La Horquetta Rangers
11	Levi **GARCIA**	(25) 20/11/97	AEK Athens (Gre)
13	Real **GILL**	(20) 23/01/03	Club Sando
19	Malcolm **SHAW**	(27) 27/07/95	Atletico Ottawa (Can)
20	Kaile **AUVRAY**	(19) 27/05/04	Sporting Kansas City II (USA)

COACH

Angus **EVE** (51) 23/02/72

UNITED STATES

GOALKEEPERS

1	Matt **TURNER**	(29) 24/06/94	Arsenal (Eng)
18	Sean **JOHNSON**	(34) 31/05/89	Toronto FC (Can)
23	Gabriel **SLONINA**	(19) 15/05/04	Chelsea (Eng)

DEFENDERS

2	DeAndre **YEDLIN**	(29) 09/07/93	Inter Miami
3	Aaron **LONG**	(30) 12/10/92	Los Angeles FC
4	Matt **MIAZGA**	(27) 19/07/95	FC Cincinnati
5	Bryan **REYNOLDS**	(21) 28/06/01	Westerlo (Bel)
12	Miles **ROBINSON**	(26) 14/03/97	Atlanta United
15	DeJuan **JONES**	(26) 24/06/97	New England Revolution
20	Jalen **NEAL**	(19) 24/08/03	LA Galaxy
21	John **TOLKIN**	(20) 31/07/02	New York Red Bulls

MIDFIELDERS

6	Gianluca **BUSIO**	(21) 28/05/02	Venezia (Ita)
7	Alan **SONORA**	(24) 03/08/98	Juarez (Mex)
24	*Jackson **YUEILL***	*(26) 19/03/97*	*San Jose Earthquakes*
8	James **SANDS**	(22) 06/07/00	New York City FC
10	Cristian **ROLDAN**	(28) 03/06/95	Seattle Sounders
14	Djordje **MIHAILOVIC**	(24) 10/11/98	AZ (Ned)
16	Aidan **MORRIS**	(21) 16/11/01	Columbus Crew
22	Julian **GRESSEL**	(29) 16/12/93	Vancouver Whitecaps (Can)

FORWARDS

9	Jesus **FERREIRA**	(22) 24/12/00	FC Dallas
11	Cade **COWELL**	(19) 14/10/03	San Jose Earthquakes
13	Jordan **MORRIS**	(28) 26/10/94	Seattle Sounders
17	Alejandro **ZENDEJAS**	(25) 07/02/98	America (Mex)
19	Brandon **VAZQUEZ**	(24) 14/10/98	FC Cincinnati

COACH

B. J. **CALLAGHAN** (41) 01/07/81

(Ages and clubs as per the tournament kick-off date of June 24. Players in italics were knockout-stage medical replacements for the players above them)

PREMIER LEAGUE FIXTURES 2023-24

AUGUST 11
Burnley v Manchester City

AUGUST 12
Arsenal v Nottingham Forest
Bournemouth v West Ham United
Brighton v Luton Town
Everton v Fulham
Sheffield United v Crystal Palace
Newcastle United v Aston Villa

AUGUST 13
Brentford v Tottenham Hotspur
Chelsea v Liverpool

AUGUST 14
Manchester United v Wolves

AUGUST 19
Aston Villa v Everton
Crystal Palace v Arsenal
Fulham v Brentford
Liverpool v Bournemouth
Luton Town p-p Burnley
Manchester City v Newcastle United
Nottingham Forest v Sheffield United
Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester United
West Ham United v Chelsea
Wolves v Brighton

AUGUST 26
Arsenal v Fulham
Bournemouth v Tottenham Hotspur
Brentford v Crystal Palace
Brighton v West Ham United
Burnley v Aston Villa
Chelsea v Luton Town
Everton v Wolves
Manchester United v Nottingham Forest
Newcastle United v Liverpool
Sheffield United v Manchester City

SEPTEMBER 2
Arsenal v Manchester United
Brentford v Bournemouth
Brighton v Newcastle United
Burnley v Tottenham Hotspur
Chelsea v Nottingham Forest
Crystal Palace v Wolves
Liverpool v Aston Villa
Luton Town v West Ham United
Manchester City v Fulham
Sheffield United v Everton

SEPTEMBER 16
Aston Villa v Crystal Palace
Bournemouth v Chelsea
Everton v Arsenal
Fulham v Luton Town
Manchester United v Brighton
Newcastle United v Brentford
Nottingham Forest v Burnley
Tottenham Hotspur v Sheffield United
West Ham United v Manchester City
Wolves v Liverpool

SEPTEMBER 23
Arsenal v Tottenham Hotspur
Brentford v Everton
Brighton v Bournemouth
Burnley v Manchester United
Chelsea v Aston Villa
Crystal Palace v Fulham
Liverpool v West Ham United
Luton Town v Wolves
Manchester City v Nottingham Forest
Sheffield United v Newcastle United

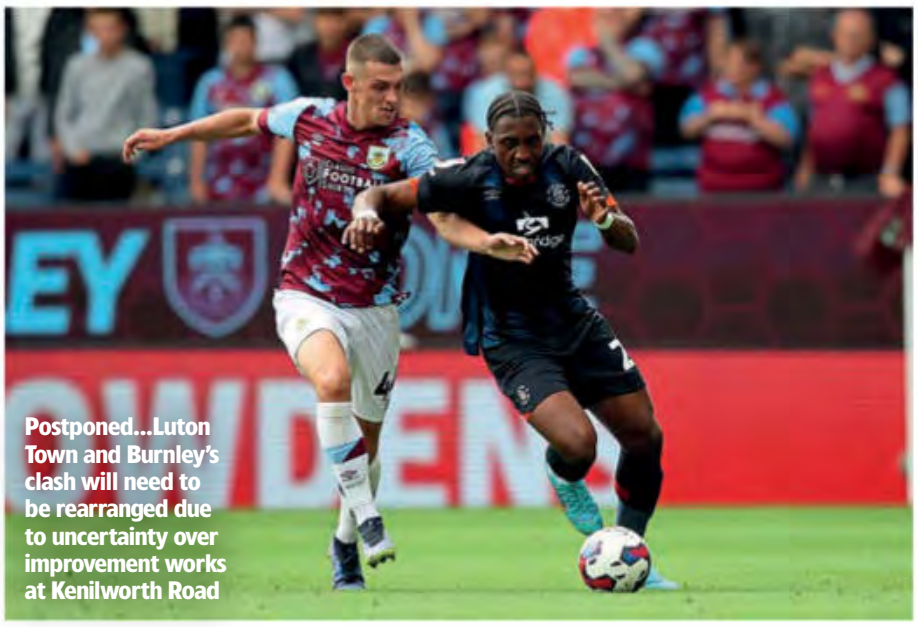
SEPTEMBER 30
Aston Villa v Brighton
Bournemouth v Arsenal
Everton v Luton Town
Fulham v Chelsea
Manchester United v Crystal Palace
Newcastle United v Burnley
Nottingham Forest v Brentford
Tottenham Hotspur v Liverpool
West Ham United v Sheffield United
Wolves v Manchester City

OCTOBER 7
Arsenal v Manchester City
Brighton v Liverpool
Burnley v Chelsea
Crystal Palace v Nottingham Forest
Everton v Bournemouth
Fulham v Sheffield United
Luton Town v Tottenham Hotspur
Manchester United v Brentford
West Ham United v Newcastle United
Wolves v Aston Villa

OCTOBER 21
Aston Villa v West Ham United
Bournemouth v Wolves
Brentford v Burnley
Chelsea v Arsenal
Liverpool v Everton
Manchester City v Brighton
Newcastle United v Crystal Palace
Nottingham Forest v Luton Town
Sheffield United v Manchester United
Tottenham Hotspur v Fulham

OCTOBER 28
Arsenal v Sheffield United
Aston Villa v Luton Town
Bournemouth v Burnley
Brighton v Fulham
Chelsea v Brentford
Crystal Palace v Tottenham Hotspur
Liverpool v Nottingham Forest
Manchester United v Manchester City
West Ham United v Everton
Wolves v Newcastle United

NOVEMBER 4
Brentford v West Ham United
Burnley v Crystal Palace
Everton v Brighton
Fulham v Manchester United


Postponed...Luton Town and Burnley's clash will need to be rearranged due to uncertainty over improvement works at Kenilworth Road

Luton Town v Liverpool
Manchester City v Bournemouth
Newcastle United v Arsenal
Nottingham Forest v Aston Villa
Sheffield United v Wolves
Tottenham Hotspur v Chelsea

NOVEMBER 11
Arsenal v Burnley
Aston Villa v Fulham
Bournemouth v Newcastle United
Brighton v Sheffield United
Chelsea v Manchester City
Crystal Palace v Everton
Liverpool v Brentford
Manchester United v Luton Town
West Ham v Nottingham Forest
Wolves v Tottenham Hotspur

NOVEMBER 25
Brentford v Arsenal
Burnley v West Ham United
Everton v Man United
Fulham v Wolves
Luton Town v Crystal Palace
Manchester City v Liverpool
Newcastle United v Chelsea
Nottingham Forest v Brighton
Sheffield United v Bournemouth
Tottenham Hotspur v Aston Villa

DECEMBER 2
Arsenal v Wolves
Bournemouth v Aston Villa
Brentford v Luton Town
Burnley v Sheffield United
Chelsea v Brighton
Liverpool v Fulham
Manchester City v Spurs
Newcastle United v Manchester United
Nottingham Forest v Everton
West Ham United v Crystal Palace

DECEMBER 5
Aston Villa v Manchester City
Brighton v Brentford
Crystal Palace v Bournemouth
Everton v Newcastle United
Fulham v Nottingham Forest
Luton Town v Arsenal
Sheffield United v Liverpool
Tottenham Hotspur v West Ham United
Wolves v Burnley

DECEMBER 6
Manchester United v Chelsea

DECEMBER 9
Aston Villa v Arsenal
Brighton v Burnley
Crystal Palace v Liverpool
Everton v Chelsea
Fulham v West Ham United
Luton Town v Manchester City
Manchester United v Bournemouth
Sheffield United v Brentford
Tottenham Hotspur v Newcastle United
Wolves v Nottingham Forest

DECEMBER 16
Arsenal v Brighton
Bournemouth v Luton Town
Brentford v Aston Villa
Burnley v Everton
Chelsea v Sheffield United
Liverpool v Manchester United
Manchester City v Crystal Palace
Newcastle United v Fulham
Nottingham Forest v Tottenham Hotspur
West Ham United v Wolves

DECEMBER 23
Aston Villa v Sheffield United
Crystal Palace v Brighton
Fulham v Burnley
Liverpool v Arsenal
Luton Town v Newcastle United
Manchester City p-p Brentford
Nottingham Forest v Bournemouth
Tottenham Hotspur v Everton
West Ham United v Manchester United
Wolves v Chelsea

DECEMBER 26
Arsenal v West Ham United
Bournemouth v Fulham
Brentford v Wolves
Brighton v Tottenham Hotspur
Burnley v Liverpool
Chelsea v Crystal Palace

Manchester derby...United and City will face-off in late October and early March

Everton v Manchester City
Manchester United v Aston Villa
Newcastle United v Nottingham Forest
Sheffield United v Luton Town

DECEMBER 30

Aston Villa v Burnley
Crystal Palace v Brentford
Fulham v Arsenal
Liverpool v Newcastle United
Luton Town v Chelsea
Manchester City v Sheffield United
Nottingham Forest v Manchester United
Tottenham Hotspur v Bournemouth
West Ham United v Brighton
Wolves v Everton

JANUARY 13/20

Arsenal v Crystal Palace
Bournemouth v Liverpool
Brentford v Nottingham Forest
Brighton v Wolves
Burnley v Luton Town
Chelsea v Fulham
Everton v Aston Villa
Manchester United v Tottenham Hotspur
Newcastle United v Manchester City
Sheffield United v West Ham United

**These round of fixtures will be split between the weekends of January 13 and January 20*

JANUARY 30

Aston Villa v Newcastle United
Crystal Palace v Sheffield United
Fulham v Everton
Luton Town v Brighton
Nottingham Forest v Arsenal
Tottenham Hotspur v Brentford
West Ham United v Bournemouth
Wolves v Manchester United

JANUARY 31

Liverpool v Chelsea
Manchester City v Burnley

FEBRUARY 3

Arsenal v Liverpool
Bournemouth v Nottingham Forest
Brentford v Manchester City
Brighton v Crystal Palace
Burnley v Fulham
Chelsea v Wolves
Everton v Tottenham Hotspur
Manchester United v West Ham United
Newcastle United v Luton Town
Sheffield United v Aston Villa

FEBRUARY 10

Aston Villa v Manchester United
Crystal Palace v Chelsea
Fulham v Bournemouth
Liverpool v Burnley
Luton Town v Sheffield United
Manchester City v Everton
Nottingham Forest v Newcastle United
Tottenham Hotspur v Brighton
West Ham United v Arsenal
Wolves v Brentford

FEBRUARY 17

Brentford v Liverpool
Burnley v Arsenal
Everton v Crystal Palace
Fulham v Aston Villa
Luton Town v Manchester United
Manchester City v Chelsea
Newcastle United v Bournemouth
Nottingham Forest v West Ham United
Sheffield United v Brighton
Tottenham Hotspur v Wolves

FEBRUARY 24

Arsenal v Newcastle United
Aston Villa v Nottingham Forest
Bournemouth v Manchester City
Brighton v Everton
Chelsea v Tottenham Hotspur
Crystal Palace v Burnley
Liverpool v Luton Town
Manchester United v Fulham
West Ham United v Brentford
Wolves v Sheffield United

MARCH 2

Brentford v Chelsea
Burnley v Bournemouth
Everton v West Ham United
Fulham v Brighton
Luton Town v Aston Villa
Manchester City v Manchester United
Newcastle United v Wolves
Nottingham Forest v Liverpool
Sheffield United v Arsenal
Tottenham Hotspur v Crystal Palace

MARCH 9

Arsenal v Brentford
Aston Villa v Tottenham Hotspur
Bournemouth v Sheffield United
Brighton v Nottingham Forest
Chelsea v Newcastle United
Crystal Palace v Luton Town
Liverpool v Manchester City
Manchester United v Everton
West Ham United v Burnley
Wolves v Fulham

MARCH 16

Arsenal v Chelsea
Brighton v Manchester City
Burnley v Brentford
Crystal Palace v Newcastle United
Everton v Liverpool
Fulham v Tottenham Hotspur
Luton Town v Nottingham Forest
Manchester United v Sheffield United
West Ham United v Aston Villa
Wolves v Bournemouth

MARCH 30

Aston Villa v Wolves
Bournemouth v Everton
Brentford v Manchester United
Chelsea v Burnley
Liverpool v Brighton
Manchester City v Arsenal
Newcastle United v West Ham United
Nottingham Forest v Crystal Palace
Sheffield United v Fulham
Tottenham Hotspur v Luton Town

APRIL 2

Arsenal v Luton Town
Bournemouth v Crystal Palace
Brentford v Brighton
Burnley v Wolves
Nottingham Forest v Fulham
West Ham United v Tottenham Hotspur

North London rivals...Arsenal travel to Spurs in late April

APRIL 3

Chelsea v Manchester United
Newcastle United v Everton
Liverpool v Sheffield United
Manchester City v Aston Villa

APRIL 6

Aston Villa v Brentford
Brighton v Arsenal
Crystal Palace v Manchester City
Everton v Burnley
Fulham v Newcastle United
Luton Town v Bournemouth
Manchester United v Liverpool
Sheffield United v Chelsea
Tottenham Hotspur v Nottingham Forest
Wolves v West Ham United

APRIL 13

Arsenal v Aston Villa
Bournemouth v Manchester United
Brentford v Sheffield United
Burnley v Brighton
Chelsea v Everton
Liverpool v Crystal Palace
Manchester City v Luton Town
Newcastle United v Tottenham Hotspur
Nottingham Forest v Wolves
West Ham United v Fulham

APRIL 20

Aston Villa v Bournemouth
Brighton v Chelsea
Crystal Palace v West Ham United
Everton v Nottingham Forest
Fulham v Liverpool
Luton Town v Brentford
Manchester United v Newcastle United
Sheffield United v Burnley
Tottenham Hotspur v Manchester City
Wolves v Arsenal

APRIL 27

Aston Villa v Chelsea
Bournemouth v Brighton
Everton v Brentford
Fulham v Crystal Palace
Manchester United v Burnley
Newcastle United v Sheffield United
Nottingham Forest v Manchester City
Tottenham Hotspur v Arsenal
West Ham United v Liverpool
Wolves v Luton Town

MAY 4

Arsenal v Bournemouth
Brentford v Fulham
Brighton v Aston Villa
Burnley v Newcastle United
Chelsea v West Ham United
Crystal Palace v Manchester United
Liverpool v Tottenham Hotspur
Luton Town v Everton
Manchester City v Wolves
Sheffield United v Nottingham Forest

MAY 11

Aston Villa v Liverpool
Bournemouth v Brentford
Everton v Sheffield United
Fulham v Manchester City
Manchester United v Arsenal
Newcastle United v Brighton
Nottingham Forest v Chelsea
Tottenham Hotspur v Burnley
West Ham United v Luton Town
Wolves v Crystal Palace

MAY 19

Arsenal v Everton
Brentford v Newcastle United
Brighton v Manchester United
Burnley v Nottingham Forest
Chelsea v Bournemouth
Crystal Palace v Aston Villa
Liverpool v Wolves
Luton Town v Fulham
Manchester City v West Ham United
Sheffield United v Tottenham Hotspur

• The majority of fixtures are for the weekend commencing rather than the exact date and are subject to change

LA LIGA FIXTURES 2023-24

AUGUST 11
Almeria v Rayo Vallecano
Sevilla v Valencia

AUGUST 12
Athletic Bilbao v Real Madrid
Celta Vigo v Osasuna
Las Palmas v Mallorca

AUGUST 13
Getafe v Barcelona
Real Sociedad v Girona
Villarreal v Real Betis

AUGUST 14
Atletico Madrid v Granada
Cadiz v Alaves

AUGUST 18
Mallorca v Villarreal
Valencia v Las Palmas

AUGUST 19
Almeria v Real Madrid
Osasuna v Athletic Bilbao
Real Sociedad v Celta Vigo

AUGUST 20
Barcelona v Cadiz
Girona v Getafe
Real Betis v Atletico Madrid

AUGUST 21
Alaves v Sevilla
Granada v Rayo Vallecano

AUGUST 27
Athletic Bilbao v Real Betis
Cadiz v Almeria
Celta Vigo v Real Madrid
Getafe v Alaves
Granada v Mallorca
Las Palmas v Real Sociedad
Rayo Vallecano v Atletico Madrid
Sevilla v Girona
Valencia v Osasuna
Villarreal v Barcelona

SEPTEMBER 3
Alaves v Valencia
Almeria v Celta Vigo
Atletico Madrid v Sevilla
Cadiz v Villarreal
Girona v Las Palmas
Mallorca v Athletic Bilbao
Osasuna v Barcelona
Real Betis v Rayo Vallecano
Real Madrid v Getafe
Real Sociedad v Granada

SEPTEMBER 17
Athletic Bilbao v Cadiz
Barcelona v Real Betis
Celta Vigo v Mallorca
Getafe v Osasuna
Granada v Girona
Rayo Vallecano v Alaves
Real Madrid v Real Sociedad
Sevilla v Las Palmas
Valencia v Atletico Madrid
Villarreal v Almeria

SEPTEMBER 24
Alaves v Athletic Bilbao
Almeria v Valencia
Atletico Madrid v Real Madrid
Barcelona v Celta Vigo
Girona v Mallorca
Las Palmas v Granada
Osasuna v Sevilla
Rayo Vallecano v Villarreal
Real Betis v Cadiz
Real Sociedad v Getafe

SEPTEMBER 27
Athletic Bilbao v Getafe
Cadiz v Rayo Vallecano
Celta Vigo v Alaves

Seville derby ...Sevilla host Real Betis in November

Granada v Real Betis
Mallorca v Barcelona
Osasuna v Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid v Las Palmas
Sevilla v Almeria
Valencia v Real Sociedad
Villarreal v Girona

OCTOBER 1
Alaves v Osasuna
Almeria v Granada
Atletico Madrid v Cadiz
Barcelona v Sevilla
Getafe v Villarreal
Girona v Real Madrid
Las Palmas v Celta Vigo
Rayo Vallecano v Mallorca
Real Betis v Valencia
Real Sociedad v Athletic Bilbao

OCTOBER 8
Alaves v Real Betis
Athletic Bilbao v Almeria
Atletico Madrid v Real Sociedad
Cadiz v Girona
Celta Vigo v Getafe
Granada v Barcelona
Mallorca v Valencia
Real Madrid v Osasuna
Sevilla v Rayo Vallecano
Villarreal v Las Palmas

OCTOBER 22
Barcelona v Athletic Bilbao
Celta Vigo v Atletico Madrid
Getafe v Real Betis
Girona v Almeria
Las Palmas v Rayo Vallecano
Osasuna v Granada
Real Sociedad v Mallorca
Sevilla v Real Madrid
Valencia v Cadiz
Villarreal v Alaves

OCTOBER 29
Almeria v Las Palmas
Athletic Bilbao v Valencia
Atletico Madrid v Alaves
Barcelona v Real Madrid
Cadiz v Sevilla
Girona v Celta Vigo
Granada v Villarreal
Mallorca v Getafe
Rayo Vallecano v Real Sociedad
Real Betis v Osasuna

NOVEMBER 5
Alaves v Almeria
Celta Vigo v Sevilla
Getafe v Cadiz
Las Palmas v Atletico Madrid
Osasuna v Girona
Real Betis v Mallorca
Real Madrid v Rayo Vallecano
Real Sociedad v Barcelona
Valencia v Granada
Villarreal v Athletic Bilbao

NOVEMBER 12
Almeria v Real Sociedad
Athletic Bilbao v Celta Vigo
Atletico Madrid v Villarreal
Real Madrid v Valencia
Sevilla v Real Betis
Mallorca v Cadiz
Granada v Getafe
Rayo Vallecano v Girona
Osasuna v Las Palmas
Barcelona v Alaves

NOVEMBER 26
Alaves v Granada
Atletico Madrid v Mallorca
Cadiz v Real Madrid
Getafe v Almeria
Girona v Athletic Bilbao
Rayo Vallecano v Barcelona
Real Betis v Las Palmas
Real Sociedad v Sevilla
Valencia v Celta Vigo
Villarreal v Osasuna

DECEMBER 3
Almeria v Real Betis
Athletic Bilbao v Rayo Vallecano
Barcelona v Atletico Madrid
Celta Vigo v Cadiz
Girona v Valencia
Las Palmas v Getafe
Mallorca v Alaves
Osasuna v Real Sociedad
Real Madrid v Granada
Sevilla v Villarreal

DECEMBER 10
Alaves v Las Palmas
Atletico Madrid v Almeria
Barcelona v Girona
Cadiz v Osasuna
Getafe v Valencia
Granada v Athletic Bilbao
Mallorca v Sevilla
Rayo Vallecano v Celta Vigo
Real Betis v Real Madrid
Villarreal v Real Sociedad

DECEMBER 17
Almeria v Mallorca
Athletic Bilbao v Atletico Madrid
Celta Vigo v Granada
Girona v Alaves
Las Palmas v Cadiz
Osasuna v Rayo Vallecano
Real Madrid v Villarreal
Real Sociedad v Real Betis
Sevilla v Getafe
Valencia v Barcelona

DECEMBER 20
Alaves v Real Madrid
Athletic Bilbao v Las Palmas
Atletico Madrid v Getafe
Barcelona v Almeria
Cadiz v Real Sociedad
Granada v Sevilla
Mallorca v Osasuna

Title showdown...the first *Clasico* takes place at the end of October

Rayo Vallecano v Valencia
Real Betis v Girona
Villarreal v Celta Vigo

JANUARY 3

Celta Vigo v Real Betis
Getafe v Rayo Vallecano
Girona v Atletico Madrid
Granada v Cadiz
Las Palmas v Barcelona
Osasuna v Almeria
Real Madrid v Mallorca
Real Sociedad v Alaves
Sevilla v Athletic Bilbao
Valencia v Villarreal

JANUARY 14

Almeria v Girona
Athletic Bilbao v Real Sociedad
Atletico Madrid v Rayo Vallecano
Barcelona v Osasuna
Cadiz v Valencia
Getafe v Real Madrid
Las Palmas v Villarreal
Mallorca v Celta Vigo
Real Betis v Granada
Sevilla v Alaves

JANUARY 21

Alaves v Cadiz
Celta Vigo v Real Sociedad
Girona v Sevilla
Granada v Atletico Madrid
Osasuna v Getafe
Rayo Vallecano v Las Palmas
Real Betis v Barcelona
Real Madrid v Almeria
Valencia v Athletic Bilbao
Villarreal v Mallorca

JANUARY 28

Almeria v Alaves
Atletico Madrid v Valencia
Barcelona v Villarreal
Cadiz v Athletic Bilbao
Celta Vigo v Girona
Getafe v Granada
Las Palmas v Real Madrid
Mallorca v Real Betis
Sevilla v Osasuna
Real Sociedad v Rayo Vallecano

FEBRUARY 4

Alaves v Barcelona
Athletic Bilbao v Mallorca
Girona v Real Sociedad
Granada v Las Palmas
Osasuna v Celta Vigo
Rayo Vallecano v Sevilla
Real Madrid v Atletico Madrid
Real Betis v Getafe
Valencia v Almeria
Villarreal v Cadiz

FEBRUARY 11

Alaves v Villarreal
Almeria v Athletic Bilbao
Barcelona v Granada
Cadiz v Real Betis
Getafe v Celta Vigo
Las Palmas v Valencia
Mallorca v Rayo Vallecano
Real Madrid v Girona
Real Sociedad v Osasuna
Sevilla v Atletico Madrid

FEBRUARY 18

Athletic Bilbao v Girona
Atletico Madrid v Las Palmas
Celta Vigo v Barcelona
Granada v Almeria
Mallorca v Real Sociedad
Osasuna v Cadiz
Rayo Vallecano v Real Madrid
Real Betis v Alaves
Valencia v Sevilla
Villarreal v Getafe

Basque battle ...Athletic host Real Sociedad in mid-January

FEBRUARY 25

Alaves v Mallorca
Almeria v Atletico Madrid
Barcelona v Getafe
Cadiz v Celta Vigo
Girona v Rayo Vallecano
Granada v Valencia
Las Palmas v Osasuna
Real Betis v Athletic Bilbao
Real Madrid v Sevilla
Real Sociedad v Villarreal

MARCH 3

Athletic Bilbao v Barcelona
Atletico Madrid v Real Betis
Celta Vigo v Almeria
Getafe v Las Palmas
Mallorca v Girona
Osasuna v Alaves
Rayo Vallecano v Cadiz
Sevilla v Real Sociedad
Valencia v Real Madrid
Villarreal v Granada

MARCH 10

Alaves v Rayo Vallecano
Almeria v Sevilla
Barcelona v Mallorca
Cadiz v Atletico Madrid
Girona v Osasuna
Granada v Real Sociedad
Las Palmas v Athletic Bilbao
Real Betis v Villarreal
Real Madrid v Celta Vigo
Valencia v Getafe

MARCH 17

Athletic Bilbao v Alaves
Atletico Madrid v Barcelona
Getafe v Girona
Las Palmas v Almeria
Mallorca v Granada
Osasuna v Real Madrid
Rayo Vallecano v Real Betis
Real Sociedad v Cadiz
Sevilla v Celta Vigo
Villarreal v Valencia

MARCH 31

Alaves v Real Sociedad
Almeria v Osasuna
Barcelona v Las Palmas
Cadiz v Granada
Celta Vigo v Rayo Vallecano
Getafe v Sevilla
Girona v Real Betis
Real Madrid v Athletic Bilbao
Valencia v Mallorca
Villarreal v Atletico Madrid

APRIL 14

Athletic Bilbao v Villarreal
Atletico Madrid v Girona
Cadiz v Barcelona
Granada v Alaves
Las Palmas v Sevilla
Mallorca v Real Madrid
Osasuna v Valencia
Rayo Vallecano v Getafe
Real Betis v Celta Vigo
Real Sociedad v Almeria

APRIL 21

Almeria v Villarreal
Athletic Bilbao v Granada
Celta Vigo v Las Palmas
Getafe v Real Sociedad
Alaves v Atletico Madrid
Real Madrid v Barcelona
Valencia v Real Betis
Girona v Cadiz
Sevilla v Mallorca
Rayo Vallecano v Osasuna

APRIL 28

Alaves v Celta Vigo
Almeria v Getafe
Atletico Madrid v Athletic Bilbao
Barcelona v Valencia
Cadiz v Mallorca
Granada v Osasuna
Las Palmas v Girona
Real Betis v Sevilla
Real Sociedad v Real Madrid
Villarreal v Rayo Vallecano

MAY 5

Celta Vigo v Villarreal
Getafe v Athletic Bilbao
Girona v Barcelona
Mallorca v Atletico Madrid
Osasuna v Real Betis
Rayo Vallecano v Almeria
Real Madrid v Cadiz
Real Sociedad v Las Palmas
Sevilla v Granada
Valencia v Alaves

MAY 12

Alaves v Girona
Athletic Bilbao v Osasuna
Atletico Madrid v Celta Vigo
Barcelona v Real Sociedad
Cadiz v Getafe
Granada v Real Madrid
Mallorca v Las Palmas
Real Betis v Almeria
Valencia v Rayo Vallecano
Villarreal v Sevilla

MAY 15

Almeria v Barcelona
Celta Vigo v Athletic Bilbao
Getafe v Atletico Madrid
Girona v Villarreal
Las Palmas v Real Betis
Osasuna v Mallorca
Rayo Vallecano v Granada
Real Madrid v Alaves
Real Sociedad v Valencia
Sevilla v Cadiz

MAY 19

Alaves v Getafe
Athletic Bilbao v Sevilla
Atletico Madrid v Osasuna
Barcelona v Rayo Vallecano
Cadiz v Las Palmas
Granada v Celta Vigo
Mallorca v Almeria
Real Betis v Real Sociedad
Valencia v Girona
Villarreal v Real Madrid

MAY 26

Almeria v Cadiz
Celta Vigo v Valencia
Getafe v Mallorca
Girona v Granada
Las Palmas v Alaves
Osasuna v Villarreal
Rayo Vallecano v Athletic Bilbao
Real Madrid v Real Betis
Real Sociedad v Atletico Madrid
Sevilla v Barcelona

• The majority of fixtures are for the weekend commencing rather than the exact date and are subject to change

BUNDESLIGA FIXTURES 2023-24

AUGUST 18
Werder Bremen v Bayern Munich

AUGUST 19
Augsburg v Borussia M'gladbach
Bayer Leverkusen v RB Leipzig
Borussia Dortmund v Cologne
Eintracht Frankfurt v Darmstadt
Hoffenheim v Freiburg
Stuttgart v Bochum
Union Berlin v Mainz
Wolfsburg v Heidenheim

AUGUST 26
Bayern Munich v Augsburg
Bochum v Borussia Dortmund
Borussia M'gladbach v Bayer Leverkusen
Cologne v Wolfsburg
Darmstadt v Union Berlin
Freiburg v Werder Bremen
Heidenheim v Hoffenheim
Mainz v Eintracht Frankfurt
RB Leipzig v Stuttgart

SEPTEMBER 2
Augsburg v Bochum
Bayer Leverkusen v Darmstadt
Borussia Dortmund v Heidenheim
Borussia M'gladbach v Bayern Munich
Eintracht Frankfurt v Cologne
Hoffenheim v Wolfsburg
Stuttgart v Freiburg
Union Berlin v RB Leipzig
Werder Bremen v Mainz

SEPTEMBER 16
Bayern Munich v Bayer Leverkusen
Bochum v Eintracht Frankfurt
Darmstadt v Borussia M'gladbach
Freiburg v Borussia Dortmund
Heidenheim v Werder Bremen
Mainz v Hoffenheim
RB Leipzig v Augsburg
Wolfsburg v Union Berlin

SEPTEMBER 23
Augsburg v Mainz
Bayer Leverkusen v Heidenheim
Bayern Munich v Bochum
Borussia Dortmund v Wolfsburg
Borussia M'gladbach v RB Leipzig
Eintracht Frankfurt v Freiburg
Stuttgart v Darmstadt
Union Berlin v Hoffenheim
Werder Bremen v Cologne

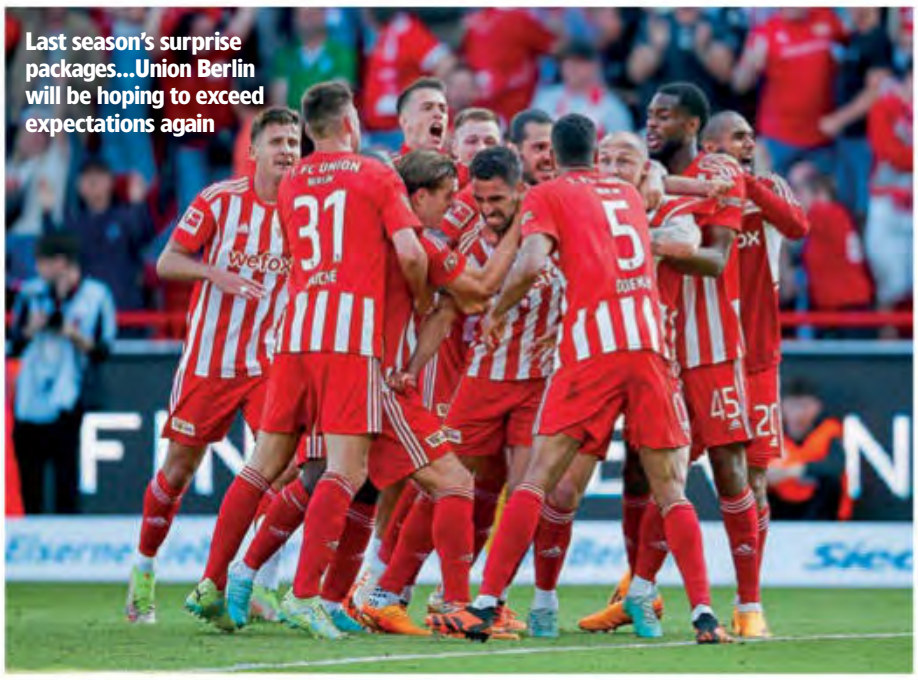
SEPTEMBER 30
Bochum v Borussia M'gladbach
Cologne v Stuttgart
Darmstadt v Werder Bremen
Freiburg v Augsburg
Heidenheim v Union Berlin
Hoffenheim v Borussia Dortmund
Mainz v Bayer Leverkusen
RB Leipzig v Bayern Munich
Wolfsburg v Eintracht Frankfurt

OCTOBER 7
Augsburg v Darmstadt
Bayer Leverkusen v Cologne
Bayern Munich v Freiburg
Borussia Dortmund v Union Berlin
Borussia M'gladbach v Mainz
Eintracht Frankfurt v Heidenheim
RB Leipzig v Bochum
Stuttgart v Wolfsburg
Werder Bremen v Hoffenheim

OCTOBER 21
Borussia Dortmund v Werder Bremen
Cologne v Borussia M'gladbach
Darmstadt v RB Leipzig
Freiburg v Bochum
Heidenheim v Augsburg
Hoffenheim v Eintracht Frankfurt
Mainz v Bayern Munich
Union Berlin v Stuttgart
Wolfsburg v Bayer Leverkusen

OCTOBER 28
Augsburg v Wolfsburg
Bayer Leverkusen v Freiburg
Bayern Munich v Darmstadt
Bochum v Mainz
Borussia M'gladbach v Heidenheim
Eintracht Frankfurt v Borussia Dortmund
RB Leipzig v Cologne
Stuttgart v Hoffenheim
Werder Bremen v Union Berlin

NOVEMBER 4
Borussia Dortmund v Bayern Munich
Cologne v Augsburg
Darmstadt v Bochum
Freiburg v Borussia M'gladbach
Heidenheim v Stuttgart
Hoffenheim v Bayer Leverkusen
Mainz v RB Leipzig
Union Berlin v Eintracht Frankfurt
Wolfsburg v Werder Bremen


Last season's surprise packages...Union Berlin will be hoping to exceed expectations again

NOVEMBER 11
Augsburg v Hoffenheim
Bayer Leverkusen v Union Berlin
Bayern Munich v Heidenheim
Bochum v Cologne
Borussia M'gladbach v Wolfsburg
Darmstadt v Mainz
RB Leipzig v Freiburg
Stuttgart v Borussia Dortmund
Werder Bremen v Eintracht Frankfurt

NOVEMBER 25
Borussia Dortmund v Borussia M'gladbach
Cologne v Bayern Munich
Eintracht Frankfurt v Stuttgart
Freiburg v Darmstadt
Heidenheim v Bochum
Hoffenheim v Mainz
Union Berlin v Augsburg
Werder Bremen v Bayer Leverkusen
Wolfsburg v RB Leipzig

DECEMBER 2
Augsburg v Eintracht Frankfurt
Bayer Leverkusen v Borussia Dortmund
Bayern Munich v Union Berlin
Bochum v Wolfsburg
Borussia M'gladbach v Hoffenheim
Darmstadt v Cologne
Mainz v Freiburg
RB Leipzig v Heidenheim
Stuttgart v Werder Bremen

DECEMBER 9
Borussia Dortmund v RB Leipzig
Cologne v Mainz
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayern Munich
Heidenheim v Darmstadt
Hoffenheim v Bochum
Stuttgart v Bayer Leverkusen
Union Berlin v Borussia M'gladbach
Werder Bremen v Augsburg
Wolfsburg v Freiburg

DECEMBER 16
Augsburg v Borussia Dortmund
Bayer Leverkusen v Eintracht Frankfurt
Bayern Munich v Stuttgart
Bochum v Union Berlin
Borussia M'gladbach V Werder Bremen
Darmstadt v Wolfsburg
Freiburg v Cologne
Mainz v Heidenheim
RB Leipzig v Hoffenheim

DECEMBER 20
Bayer Leverkusen v Bochum
Borussia Dortmund v Mainz
Eintracht Frankfurt v Borussia M'gladbach
Heidenheim v Freiburg
Hoffenheim v Darmstadt
Stuttgart v Augsburg
Union Berlin v Cologne
Werder Bremen v RB Leipzig
Wolfsburg v Bayern Munich

JANUARY 13
Augsburg v Bayer Leverkusen
Bayern Munich v Hoffenheim
Bochum v Werder Bremen
Borussia M'gladbach v Stuttgart
Cologne v Heidenheim
Darmstadt v Borussia Dortmund
Freiburg v Union Berlin
Mainz v Wolfsburg
RB Leipzig v Eintracht Frankfurt

JANUARY 20
Bayern Munich v Werder Bremen
Bochum v Stuttgart
Borussia M'gladbach v Augsburg
Cologne v Borussia Dortmund
Darmstadt v Eintracht Frankfurt
Freiburg v Hoffenheim
Heidenheim v Wolfsburg
Mainz v Union Berlin
RB Leipzig v Bayer Leverkusen

JANUARY 27
Augsburg v Bayern Munich
Bayer Leverkusen v Borussia M'gladbach
Borussia Dortmund v Bochum

Greens face-off ...Werder Bremen visit Wolfsburg in early November

Der Klassiker… **Bayern Munich host Borussia Dortmund at the end of March**

Eintracht Frankfurt v Mainz
Hoffenheim v Heidenheim
Stuttgart v RB Leipzig
Union Berlin v Darmstadt
Werder Bremen v Freiburg
Wolfsburg v Cologne

FEBRUARY 3

Bayern Munich v Borussia M'gladbach
Bochum v Augsburg
Cologne v Eintracht Frankfurt
Darmstadt v Bayer Leverkusen
Freiburg v Stuttgart
Heidenheim v Borussia Dortmund
Mainz v Werder Bremen
RB Leipzig v Union Berlin
Wolfsburg v Hoffenheim

FEBRUARY 10

Augsburg v RB Leipzig
Bayer Leverkusen v Bayern Munich
Borussia Dortmund v Freiburg
Borussia M'gladbach v Darmstadt
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bochum
Hoffenheim v Cologne
Stuttgart v Mainz
Union Berlin v Wolfsburg
Werder Bremen v Heidenheim

FEBRUARY 17

Bochum v Bayern Munich
Cologne v Werder Bremen
Darmstadt v Stuttgart
Freiburg v Eintracht Frankfurt
Heidenheim v Bayer Leverkusen
Hoffenheim v Union Berlin
Mainz v Augsburg
RB Leipzig v Borussia M'gladbach
Wolfsburg v Borussia Dortmund

FEBRUARY 24

Augsburg v Freiburg
Bayer Leverkusen v Mainz
Bayern Munich v RB Leipzig
Borussia Dortmund v Hoffenheim
Borussia M'gladbach v Bochum
Eintracht Frankfurt v Wolfsburg
Stuttgart v Cologne
Union Berlin v Heidenheim
Werder Bremen v Darmstadt

MARCH 2

Bochum v RB Leipzig
Cologne v Bayer Leverkusen
Darmstadt v Augsburg
Freiburg v Bayern Munich
Heidenheim v Eintracht Frankfurt
Hoffenheim v Werder Bremen
Mainz v Borussia M'gladbach
Union Berlin v Borussia Dortmund
Wolfsburg v Stuttgart

MARCH 9

Augsburg v Heidenheim
Bayer Leverkusen v Wolfsburg
Bayern Munich v Mainz
Bochum v Freiburg
Borussia M'gladbach v Cologne
Eintracht Frankfurt v Hoffenheim
RB Leipzig v Darmstadt
Stuttgart v Union Berlin
Werder Bremen v Borussia Dortmund

MARCH 16

Borussia Dortmund v Eintracht Frankfurt
Cologne v RB Leipzig
Darmstadt v Bayern Munich
Freiburg v Bayer Leverkusen
Heidenheim v Borussia M'gladbach
Hoffenheim v Stuttgart
Mainz v Bochum
Union Berlin v Werder Bremen
Wolfsburg v Augsburg

MARCH 30

Augsburg v Cologne
Bayer Leverkusen v Hoffenheim
Bayern Munich v Borussia Dortmund
Bochum v Darmstadt
Borussia M'gladbach v Freiburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Union Berlin
RB Leipzig v Mainz
Stuttgart v Heidenheim
Werder Bremen v Wolfsburg

APRIL 6

Borussia Dortmund v Stuttgart
Cologne v Bochum
Eintracht Frankfurt v Werder Bremen
Freiburg v RB Leipzig
Heidenheim v Bayern Munich
Hoffenheim v Augsburg
Mainz v Darmstadt
Union Berlin v Bayer Leverkusen
Wolfsburg v Borussia M'gladbach

APRIL 13

Augsburg v Union Berlin
Bayer Leverkusen v Werder Bremen
Bayern Munich v Cologne
Bochum v Heidenheim
Borussia M'gladbach v Borussia Dortmund
Darmstadt v Freiburg
Mainz v Hoffenheim
RB Leipzig v Wolfsburg
Stuttgart v Eintracht Frankfurt

APRIL 20

Borussia Dortmund v Bayer Leverkusen
Cologne v Darmstadt
Eintracht Frankfurt v Augsburg
Freiburg v Mainz
Heidenheim v RB Leipzig
Hoffenheim v Borussia M'gladbach
Union Berlin v Bayern Munich
Werder Bremen v Stuttgart
Wolfsburg v Bochum

APRIL 27

Augsburg v Werder Bremen
Bayer Leverkusen v Stuttgart
Bayern Munich v Eintracht Frankfurt
Bochum v Hoffenheim
Borussia M'gladbach v Union Berlin
Darmstadt v Heidenheim
Freiburg v Wolfsburg
Mainz v Cologne
RB Leipzig v Borussia Dortmund

MAY 4

Borussia Dortmund v Augsburg
Cologne v Freiburg
Eintracht Frankfurt v Bayer Leverkusen
Heidenheim v Mainz
Hoffenheim v RB Leipzig
Stuttgart v Bayern Munich
Union Berlin v Bochum
Werder Bremen v Borussia M'gladbach
Wolfsburg v Darmstadt

MAY 11

Augsburg v Stuttgart
Bayern Munich v Wolfsburg
Bochum v Bayer Leverkusen
Borussia M'gladbach v Eintracht Frankfurt
Cologne v Union Berlin
Darmstadt v Hoffenheim
Freiburg v Heidenheim
Mainz v Borussia Dortmund
RB Leipzig v Werder Bremen

MAY 18

Bayer Leverkusen v Augsburg
Borussia Dortmund v Darmstadt
Eintracht Frankfurt v RB Leipzig
Heidenheim v Cologne
Hoffenheim v Bayern Munich
Stuttgart v Borussia M'gladbach
Union Berlin v Freiburg
Werder Bremen v Bochum
Wolfsburg v Mainz

• The majority of fixtures are for the weekend commencing rather than the exact date and are subject to change

LIGUE 1 FIXTURES 2023-24

AUGUST 13
Brest v Lens
Clermont v Monaco
Marseille v Reims
Montpellier v Le Havre
Nantes v Toulouse
Nice v Lille
Paris Saint-Germain v Lorient
Rennes v Metz
Strasbourg v Lyon

AUGUST 20
Le Havre v Brest
Lens v Rennes
Lille v Nantes
Lorient v Nice
Lyon v Montpellier
Metz v Marseille
Monaco v Strasbourg
Reims v Clermont
Toulouse v Paris Saint-Germain

AUGUST 27
Clermont v Metz
Lorient v Lille
Marseille v Brest
Montpellier v Reims
Nantes v Monaco
Nice v Lyon
Paris Saint-Germain v Lens
Rennes v Le Havre
Strasbourg v Toulouse

SEPTEMBER 3
Brest v Rennes
Le Havre v Lorient
Lille v Montpellier
Lyon v Paris Saint-Germain
Metz v Reims
Monaco v Lens
Nantes v Marseille
Nice v Strasbourg
Toulouse v Clermont

SEPTEMBER 17
Clermont v Nantes
Lens v Metz
Lorient v Monaco
Lyon v Le Havre
Marseille v Toulouse
Paris Saint-Germain v Nice
Reims v Brest
Rennes v Lille
Strasbourg v Montpellier

SEPTEMBER 24
Brest v Lyon
Le Havre v Clermont
Lens v Toulouse
Lille v Reims
Metz v Strasbourg
Monaco v Nice
Montpellier v Rennes
Nantes v Lorient
Paris Saint-Germain v Marseille

OCTOBER 1
Clermont v Paris Saint-Germain
Le Havre v Lille
Lorient v Montpellier
Monaco v Marseille
Nice v Brest
Reims v Lyon
Rennes v Nantes
Strasbourg v Lens
Toulouse v Metz

OCTOBER 8
Brest v Toulouse
Lens v Lille
Lyon v Lorient
Marseille v Le Havre
Metz v Nice
Montpellier v Clermont
Reims v Monaco
Rennes v Paris Saint-Germain
Strasbourg v Nantes

OCTOBER 22
Le Havre v Lens
Lille v Brest
Lorient v Rennes
Lyon v Clermont
Monaco v Metz
Nantes v Montpellier
Nice v Marseille
Paris Saint-Germain v Strasbourg
Toulouse v Reims

OCTOBER 29
Brest v Paris Saint-Germain
Clermont v Nice
Lens v Nantes
Lille v Monaco
Marseille v Lyon
Metz v Le Havre
Montpellier v Toulouse
Reims v Lorient
Rennes v Strasbourg

NOVEMBER 5
Lorient v Lens
Lyon v Metz
Marseille v Lille
Monaco v Brest
Nantes v Reims
Nice v Rennes
Paris Saint-Germain v Montpellier
Strasbourg v Clermont
Toulouse v Le Havre

NOVEMBER 12
Brest v Strasbourg
Clermont v Lorient
Le Havre v Monaco
Lens v Marseille
Lille v Toulouse
Metz v Nantes
Montpellier v Nice
Reims v Paris Saint-Germain
Rennes v Lyon

NOVEMBER 26
Clermont v Lens
Lorient v Metz
Lyon v Lille
Montpellier v Brest
Nantes v Le Havre
Nice v Toulouse
Paris Saint-Germain v Monaco
Rennes v Reims
Strasbourg v Marseille

DECEMBER 3
Brest v Clermont
Le Havre v Paris Saint-Germain
Lens v Lyon
Lille v Metz
Marseille v Rennes
Monaco Montpellier
Nantes v Nice
Reims v Strasbourg
Toulouse v Lorient

DECEMBER 10
Clermont v Lille
Lorient v Marseille
Lyon v Toulouse
Metz v Brest
Montpellier v Lens
Nice v Reims
Paris Saint-Germain v Nantes
Rennes v Monaco
Strasbourg v Le Havre

DECEMBER 17
Le Havre v Nice
Lens v Reims
Lille v Paris Saint-Germain
Lorient v Strasbourg
Marseille v Clermont
Metz v Montpellier
Monaco v Lyon
Nantes v Brest
Toulouse v Rennes

Battle for supremacy...last season's top two PSG and Lens meet early in August

Back in the big time... Le Havre are playing in Ligue 1 again for the first time since 2008-09

DECEMBER 20

Brest v Lorient
Clermont v Rennes
Lyon v Nantes
Montpellier v Marseille
Nice v Lens
Paris Saint-Germain v Metz
Reims v Le Havre
Strasbourg v Lille
Toulouse v Monaco

JANUARY 13

Brest v Montpellier
Le Havre v Lyon
Lille v Lorient
Marseille v Strasbourg
Metz v Toulouse
Monaco v Reims
Nantes v Clermont
Rennes v Nice

JANUARY 14

Lens v Paris Saint-Germain

JANUARY 28

Clermont v Strasbourg
Lorient v Le Havre
Lyon v Rennes
Marseille v Monaco
Montpellier v Lille
Nice v Metz
Paris Saint-Germain v Brest
Reims v Nantes
Toulouse v Lens

FEBRUARY 4

Brest v Nice
Lille v Clermont
Lyon v Marseille
Metz v Lorient
Monaco v Le Havre
Nantes v Lens
Reims v Toulouse
Rennes v Montpellier
Strasbourg v Paris Saint-Germain

FEBRUARY 11

Clermont v Brest
Le Havre v Rennes
Lens v Strasbourg
Lorient v Reims
Marseille v Metz
Montpellier v Lyon
Nice v Monaco
Paris Saint-Germain v Lille
Toulouse v Nantes

FEBRUARY 18

Brest v Marseille
Lille v Le Havre
Lyon v Nice
Monaco v Toulouse
Montpellier v Metz
Nantes v Paris Saint-Germain
Reims v Lens
Rennes v Clermont
Strasbourg v Lorient

FEBRUARY 25

Le Havre v Reims
Lens v Monaco
Lorient v Nantes
Marseille v Montpellier
Metz v Lyon
Nice v Clermont
Paris Saint-Germain v Rennes
Strasbourg v Brest
Toulouse v Lille

MARCH 3

Brest v Le Havre
Clermont v Marseille
Lyon v Lens
Monaco v Paris Saint-Germain
Montpellier v Strasbourg
Nantes v Metz
Reims v Lille
Rennes v Lorient
Toulouse v Nice

MARCH 10

Le Havre v Toulouse
Lens v Brest
Lille v Rennes
Lorient v Lyon
Marseille v Nantes
Metz v Clermont
Nice v Montpellier
Paris Saint-Germain v Reims
Strasbourg v Monaco

MARCH 17

Brest v Lille
Clermont v Le Havre
Lens v Nice
Monaco v Lorient
Montpellier v Paris Saint-Germain
Nantes v Strasbourg
Reims v Metz
Rennes v Marseille
Toulouse v Lyon

MARCH 31

Clermont v Toulouse
Le Havre v Montpellier
Lille v Lens
Lorient v Brest
Lyon v Reims
Marseille v Paris Saint-Germain
Metz v Monaco
Nice v Nantes
Strasbourg v Rennes

APRIL 7

Brest v Metz
Lens v Le Havre
Lille v Marseille
Monaco v Rennes
Montpellier v Lorient
Nantes v Lyon
Paris Saint-Germain v Clermont
Reims v Nice
Toulouse v Strasbourg

APRIL 14

Clermont v Montpellier
Le Havre v Nantes
Lorient v Paris Saint-Germain
Lyon v Brest
Metz v Lens
Monaco v Lille
Marseille v Nice
Rennes v Toulouse
Strasbourg v Reims

APRIL 21

Brest v Monaco
Le Havre v Metz
Lens v Clermont
Lille v Strasbourg
Nantes v Rennes
Nice v Lorient
Paris Saint-Germain v Lyon
Reims v Montpellier
Toulouse v Marseille

APRIL 28

Clermont v Reims
Lorient Toulouse
Lyon v Monaco
Marseille v Lens
Metz v Lille
Montpellier v Nantes
Paris Saint-Germain v Le Havre
Rennes v Brest
Strasbourg v Nice

MAY 4

Brest v Nantes
Le Havre v Strasbourg
Lens v Lorient
Lille v Lyon
Metz v Rennes
Monaco v Clermont
Nice v Paris Saint-Germain
Reims v Marseille
Toulouse v Montpellier

MAY 11

Brest v Reims
Clermont v Lyon
Marseille v Lorient
Montpellier v Monaco
Nantes v Lille
Nice v Le Havre
Paris Saint-Germain v Toulouse
Rennes v Lens
Strasbourg v Metz

MAY 18

Le Havre v Marseille
Lens v Montpellier
Lille v Nice
Lorient v Clermont
Lyon v Strasbourg
Metz v Paris Saint-Germain
Monaco v Nantes
Reims v Rennes
Toulouse v Brest

New appointment...Strasbourg coach Patrick Vieira will face his old club Nice in late April

• The majority of fixtures are for the weekend commencing rather than the exact date and are subject to change

SERIE A FIXTURES 2023-24

AUGUST 20
Bologna v Milan
Empoli v Verona
Frosinone v Napoli
Genoa v Fiorentina
Internazionale v Monza
Lecce v Lazio
Roma v Salernitana
Sassuolo v Atalanta
Torino v Cagliari
Udinese v Juventus

AUGUST 27
Cagliari v Internazionale
Fiorentina v Lecce
Frosinone v Atalanta
Juventus v Bologna
Lazio v Genoa
Milan v Torino
Monza v Empoli
Napoli v Sassuolo
Salernitana v Udinese
Verona v Roma

SEPTEMBER 3
Atalanta v Monza
Bologna v Cagliari
Empoli v Juventus
Internazionale v Fiorentina
Lecce v Salernitana
Napoli v Lazio
Roma v Milan
Sassuolo v Verona
Torino v Genoa
Udinese v Frosinone

SEPTEMBER 17
Cagliari v Udinese
Fiorentina v Atalanta
Frosinone v Sassuolo
Genoa v Napoli
Internazionale v Milan
Juventus v Lazio
Monza v Lecce
Roma v Empoli
Salernitana v Torino
Verona v Bologna

SEPTEMBER 24
Atalanta v Cagliari
Bologna v Napoli
Empoli v Internazionale
Lazio v Monza
Lecce v Genoa
Milan v Verona
Salernitana v Frosinone
Sassuolo v Juventus
Torino v Roma
Udinese v Fiorentina

SEPTEMBER 27
Cagliari v Milan
Empoli v Salernitana
Frosinone v Fiorentina
Genoa v Roma
Internazionale v Sassuolo
Juventus v Lecce
Lazio v Torino
Monza v Bologna
Napoli v Udinese
Verona v Atalanta

OCTOBER 1
Atalanta v Juventus
Bologna v Empoli
Fiorentina v Cagliari
Lecce v Napoli
Milan v Lazio
Roma v Frosinone
Salernitana v Internazionale
Sassuolo v Monza
Torino v Verona
Udinese v Genoa

OCTOBER 8
Cagliari v Roma
Empoli v Udinese
Frosinone v Verona
Genoa v Milan
Internazionale v Bologna
Juventus v Torino
Lazio v Atalanta
Lecce v Sassuolo
Monza v Salernitana
Napoli v Fiorentina

OCTOBER 22
Atalanta v Genoa
Bologna v Frosinone
Fiorentina v Empoli
Milan v Juventus
Roma v Monza
Salernitana v Cagliari
Sassuolo v Lazio
Torino v Internazionale
Udinese v Lecce
Verona v Napoli

OCTOBER 29
Cagliari v Frosinone
Empoli v Atalanta
Genoa v Salernitana
Internazionale v Roma
Juventus v Verona
Lazio v Fiorentina
Lecce v Torino
Monza v Udinese
Napoli v Milan
Sassuolo v Bologna

NOVEMBER 5
Atalanta v Internazionale
Bologna v Lazio
Cagliari v Genoa
Fiorentina v Juventus
Frosinone v Empoli
Milan v Udinese
Roma v Lecce
Salernitana v Napoli
Torino v Sassuolo
Verona v Monza

NOVEMBER 12
Fiorentina v Bologna
Genoa v Verona
Internazionale v Frosinone
Juventus v Cagliari
Lazio v Roma
Lecce v Milan
Monza v Torino
Napoli v Empoli
Sassuolo v Salernitana
Udinese v Atalanta

NOVEMBER 26
Atalanta v Napoli
Bologna v Torino
Cagliari v Monza
Empoli v Sassuolo
Frosinone v Genoa
Juventus v Internazionale
Milan v Fiorentina
Roma v Udinese
Salernitana v Lazio
Verona v Lecce

DECEMBER 3
Fiorentina v Salernitana
Genoa v Empoli
Lazio v Cagliari
Lecce v Bologna
Milan v Frosinone
Monza v Juventus
Napoli v Inter
Sassuolo v Roma
Torino v Atalanta
Udinese v Verona

DECEMBER 10
Atalanta v Milan
Cagliari v Sassuolo
Empoli v Lecce
Frosinone v Torino
Inter v Udinese
Juventus v Napoli
Monza v Genoa
Roma v Fiorentina
Salernitana v Bologna
Verona v Lazio

DECEMBER 17
Atalanta v Salernitana
Bologna v Roma
Fiorentina v Verona
Genoa v Juventus
Lazio v Internazionale
Lecce v Frosinone
Milan v Monza
Napoli v Cagliari
Torino v Empoli
Udinese v Sassuolo

DECEMBER 23
Bologna v Atalanta
Empoli v Lazio
Frosinone v Juventus
Internazionale v Lecce
Monza v Fiorentina
Roma v Napoli

Salernitana v Milan
Sassuolo v Genoa
Torino v Udinese
Verona v Cagliari

DECEMBER 30
Atalanta v Lecce
Cagliari v Empoli
Fiorentina v Torino
Genoa v Internazionale
Juventus v Roma
Lazio v Frosinone
Milan v Sassuolo
Napoli v Monza
Udinese v Bologna
Verona v Salernitana

JANUARY 7
Bologna v Genoa

Crunch clash...Juventus take on defending champions Napoli a fortnight before Christmas

Milan derby...get September 17 and April 21 in the diary

Empoli v Milan
Frosinone v Monza
Internazionale v Verona
Lecce v Cagliari
Roma v Atalanta
Salernitana v Juventus
Sassuolo v Fiorentina
Torino v Napoli
Udinese v Lazio

JANUARY 14

Atalanta v Frosinone
Cagliari v Bologna
Fiorentina v Udinese
Genoa v Torino
Juventus v Sassuolo
Lazio v Lecce
Milan v Roma
Monza v Internazionale
Napoli v Salernitana
Verona v Empoli

JANUARY 21

Bologna v Fiorentina
Empoli v Monza
Frosinone v Cagliari
Internazionale v Atalanta
Lecce v Juventus
Roma v Verona
Salernitana v Genoa
Sassuolo v Napoli
Torino v Lazio
Udinese v Milan

JANUARY 28

Atalanta v Udinese
Cagliari v Torino
Fiorentina v Internazionale
Genoa v Lecce
Juventus v Empoli
Lazio v Napoli
Milan v Bologna
Monza v Sassuolo
Salernitana v Roma
Verona v Frosinone

FEBRUARY 4

Atalanta v Lazio
Bologna v Sassuolo
Empoli v Genoa
Frosinone v Milan
Internazionale v Juventus
Lecce v Fiorentina
Napoli v Verona
Roma v Cagliari
Torino v Salernitana
Udinese v Monza

FEBRUARY 11

Bologna v Lecce
Cagliari v Lazio
Fiorentina v Frosinone
Genoa v Atalanta
Juventus v Udinese
Milan v Napoli
Monza v Verona
Roma v Internazionale
Salernitana v Empoli
Sassuolo v Torino

FEBRUARY 18

Atalanta v Sassuolo
Empoli v Fiorentina
Frosinone v Roma
Internazionale v Salernitana
Lazio v Bologna
Monza v Milan
Napoli v Genoa
Torino v Lecce
Udinese v Cagliari
Verona v Juventus

FEBRUARY 25

Bologna v Verona
Cagliari v Napoli
Fiorentina v Lazio
Genoa v Udinese
Juventus v Frosinone
Lecce v Inter
Milan v Atalanta
Roma v Torino
Salernitana v Monza
Sassuolo v Empoli

MARCH 3

Atalanta v Bologna
Empoli v Cagliari
Frosinone v Lecce
Internazionale v Genoa
Lazio v Milan
Monza v Roma
Napoli v Juventus
Torino v Fiorentina
Udinese v Salernitana
Verona v Sassuolo

MARCH 10

Bologna v Internazionale
Cagliari v Salernitana
Fiorentina v Roma
Genoa v Monza
Juventus v Atalanta
Lazio v Udinese
Lecce v Verona
Milan v Empoli
Napoli v Torino
Sassuolo v Frosinone

MARCH 17

Atalanta v Fiorentina
Empoli v Bologna
Frosinone v Lazio
Internazionale v Napoli
Juventus v Genoa
Monza v Cagliari
Roma v Sassuolo
Salernitana v Lecce
Udinese v Torino
Verona v Milan

MARCH 30

Bologna v Salernitana
Cagliari v Verona
Fiorentina v Milan
Genoa v Frosinone
Internazionale v Empoli
Lazio v Juventus
Lecce v Roma
Napoli v Atalanta
Sassuolo v Udinese
Torino v Monza

APRIL 7

Cagliari v Atalanta
Empoli v Torino
Frosinone v Bologna
Juventus v Fiorentina
Milan v Lecce
Monza v Napoli
Roma v Lazio
Salernitana v Sassuolo
Udinese v Internazionale
Verona v Genoa

APRIL 14

Atalanta v Verona
Bologna v Monza
Fiorentina v Genoa
Internazionale v Cagliari
Lazio v Salernitana
Lecce v Empoli
Napoli v Frosinone
Sassuolo v Milan
Torino v Juventus
Udinese v Roma

APRIL 21

Cagliari v Juventus
Empoli v Napoli
Genoa v Lazio
Milan v Internazionale
Monza v Atalanta
Roma v Bologna
Salernitana v Fiorentina
Sassuolo v Lecce
Torino v Frosinone
Verona v Udinese

APRIL 28

Atalanta v Empoli
Bologna v Udinese
Fiorentina v Sassuolo
Frosinone v Salernitana
Genoa v Cagliari
Internazionale v Torino
Juventus v Milan
Lazio v Verona
Lecce v Monza
Napoli v Roma

MAY 5

Cagliari v Lecce
Empoli v Frosinone
Milan v Genoa
Monza v Lazio
Roma v Juventus
Salernitana v Atalanta
Sassuolo v Inter
Torino v Bologna
Udinese v Napoli
Verona v Fiorentina

MAY 12

Atalanta v Roma
Fiorentina v Monza
Frosinone v Internazionale
Genoa v Sassuolo
Juventus v Salernitana
Lazio v Empoli
Lecce v Udinese
Milan v Cagliari
Napoli v Bologna
Verona v Torino

MAY 19

Bologna v Juventus
Fiorentina v Napoli
Internazionale v Lazio
Lecce v Atalanta
Monza v Frosinone
Roma v Genoa
Salernitana v Verona
Sassuolo v Cagliari
Torino v Milan
Udinese v Empoli

MAY 26

Atalanta v Torino
Cagliari v Fiorentina
Empoli v Roma
Frosinone v Udinese
Genoa v Bologna
Juventus v Monza
Lazio v Sassuolo
Milan v Salernitana
Napoli v Lecce
Verona v Internazionale

Derby della Capitale... Roma v Lazio is always box office

• *The majority of fixtures are for the weekend commencing rather than the exact date and are subject to change*

Internationals

EURO 2024 QUALIFIERS

Group A

Jun 17 – Oslo
Norway 1 (Haaland 61 pen)
Scotland 2 (Dykes 87, McLean 89)
Norway: Nyland – Ryerson, Strandberg, Ostigard, Melling; Odegaard, Berg (Strand Larsen 84), Aursnes (Thorstvedt 84); Sorloth (Elyounoussi 79), Haaland (Daehli 84), Solbakken (Berge 63).
Scotland: Gunn – Porteous (McLean 79), Hendry, Tierney (Cooper 65); Hickey, McTominay, McGregor (Gilmour 78), Robertson; Christie (Armstrong 78), Dykes, McGinn (Hyam 90+1).

Jun 17 – Larnaca
Cyprus 1 (Pittas 39 pen)
Georgia 2 (Mikautadze 31, Davitashvili 84)
Cyprus: Mall – Karo (Antoniades 63), Gogic, Laifis; Antoniou, Kastanos, Kousoulos, Charalampous (Satsias 78); Anderson Correia; Pittas (Christofi 78), Tzionis (Loizou 60).
Georgia: Mamardashvili – Kakabadze, Kashia, Lochoshvili (Dvali 87); Gocholeishvili (Lobzhanidze 74), Chakvetadze (Davitashvili 74), Kvekveskiri (Gagnidze 74), Kiteishvili, Azarov; Mikautadze (Zivzivadze 88), Kvaratskhelia.

Jun 20 – Oslo
Norway 3 (Solbakken 12, Haaland 56 pen, 60)
Cyprus 1 (Kastanos 90+3)
Norway: Nyland – Ryerson (Wembangomo 59), Strandberg, Ostigard, Melling; Odegaard, Berg (Thorstvedt 74), Aursnes (Velde 87); Sorloth, Haaland (Finne 87), Solbakken (Berge 58).
Cyprus: Mall – Antoniou (Loizou 62), Gogic, Laifis, Ioannou, Anderson Correia; Charalampous (Tzionis 62), Kousoulos (Satsias 90+2), Kastanos, Pileas (Andreou 61); Pittas (Christofi 70).

Jun 20 – Glasgow
Scotland 2 (McGregor 6, McTominay 47)
Georgia 0
Scotland: Gunn – Hickey, Porteous, Hendry, Tierney (Souttar 79), Robertson; McTominay, Gilmour (McLean 86), McGregor (Jack 79); McGinn (Christie 90+2), Dykes (Nisbet 79).
Georgia: Mamardashvili – Kakabadze, Kvirkvelia, Kashia, Dvali (Gocholeishvili 56); Lobzhanidze (Davitashvili 64), Kvekveskiri (Zivzivadze 56), Gagnidze, Kvaratskhelia; Kiteishvili; Mikautadze.

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Scotland	4	4	0	0	9	1	12
Georgia	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Norway	4	1	1	2	5	7	4
Spain	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Cyprus	3	0	0	3	2	8	0

Group B

Jun 16 – Faro
Gibraltar 0
France 3 (Giroud 3, Mbappe 45+3 pen, Mouelhi 78 og)
Gibraltar: Coleing – Sergeant, R. Chipolina, Lopes, Olivero, Britto; Casciaro (De Barr 60), Pozo (J. Chipolina 84), Hartman (Annesley 60), Ronan (Wiseman 71); El Hmidi (Mouelhi 60).
France: Samba – Pavard, W. Fofana, Konate (Disasi 84), T. Hernandez; Griezmann (Nkunku 66), Tchouameni, Camavinga (Y. Fofana 79); Coman (Dembele 66), Giroud (Kolo Muani 66), Mbappe.

Jun 16 – Athens
Greece 2 (Bakasetas 15 pen, Masouras 49)
Republic of Ireland 1 (Collins 27)
Greece: Vlachodimos – Baldock, Mavropanos, Hatzidiakos, Tsimikas; Kourbellis, Mantalos (Siopsis 90); Masouras, Bakasetas (Tzavellas 90+4), Pekas (Fountas 71), Pavlidis (Giakoumakis 71).
Republic of Ireland: Bazunu – Collins, Egan, Lenihan (Parrott 89); Doherty, Cullen, Molumby (Obafemi 81), O'Dowda (McClean 53); Smallbone (Knight 53); Idah (Johnston 46), Ferguson.
Sent off: Doherty 90+5.

Jun 19 – Saint-Denis
France 1 (Mbappe 55 pen)
Greece 0
France: Maignan – Kounde, Konate, Upamecano, T. Hernandez; Tchouameni, Camavinga; Coman (Dembele 77), Griezmann (Nkunku 86), Mbappe; Kolo Muani (Giroud 86).
Greece: Vlachodimos – Baldock, Mavropanos, Hatzidiakos, Tsimikas; Siopsis (Fountas 66), Kourbellis (Bouchalakis 86); Masouras (Koulierakis 71), Bakasetas (Retsos 72), Mantalos; Giakoumakis (Pavlidis 66).
Sent off: Mavropanos 69.

Jun 19 – Dublin
Republic of Ireland 3 (Johnston 52, Ferguson 59, Idah 90+2)
Gibraltar 0
Republic of Ireland: Bazunu – Egan, O'Shea, Collins (Johnston 46); Cullen; Knight (Hendrick 85), Smallbone (Browne 72), McGrath, McClean; Ferguson (Idah 84), Obafemi (Parrott 58).
Gibraltar: Coleing – Sergeant (Wiseman 46), R. Chipolina (Mouelhi 43), Lopes, Annesley, Olivero; Ronan, Pozo (Jolley 68), Hartman, Britto (Ballantine 73); El Hmidi (De Barr 46).

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
France	4	4	0	0	9	0	12
Greece	3	2	0	1	6	2	6
Rep. of Ireland	3	1	0	2	5	3	3
Netherlands	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Gibraltar	4	0	0	4	0	12	0

Group C

Jun 16 – Ta'Qali
Malta 0
England 4 (Apap 8 og, Alexander-Arnold 28, Kane 31 pen, Wilson 83 pen)
Malta: Bonello – Apap, S. Borg, Z. Muscat; J. Mbong, Kristensen (N. Muscat 60), Guillaumier (Yankam 46), Teuma, Attard (Corbalan 87); Nwoko (Satariano 60), Jones (Degabriele 77).
England: Pickford – Trippier, Guehi, Maguire, Shaw (Mings 60); Alexander-Arnold, Rice, Henderson (Rashford 60); Saka (Foden 46), Kane (Wilson 60), Maddison (Eze 70).

Jun 16 – Skopje
North Macedonia 2 (Bardhi 31 pen, Elmas 39)
Ukraine 3 (Zabarnyi 62, Konoplya 67, Tsygankov 83)
North Macedonia: Dimitrievski – Ashkovski (Brdarovski 64, Do. Babunski 90), S. Ristovski, Zajkov, Musliu, Alioski; Ademi (Atanasov 61), Elmas, Bardhi; Trajkovski (Doriev 76), Nestorovski (M. Ristovski 65).
Sent off: Musliu 72.
Ukraine: Trubin – Tymchyk (Konoplya 46), Zabarnyi, Matviyenko, Mykolenko; Yarmolenko (Malinovskyi 66), Stepanenko, Sudakov, Murdyk (Sydorchuk 90); Tsygankov (Zubkov 90+3), Dovbyk (Vanat 46).

Jun 19 – Manchester
England 7 (Kane 29, 73 pen, Saka 38, 47, 51, Rashford 45, Phillips 64)
North Macedonia 0
England: Pickford – Walker, Stones, Maguire, Shaw; Alexander-Arnold, Rice (Phillips 59), Henderson (Gallagher 58); Saka (Foden 59), Kane (Wilson 74), Rashford (Grealish 58).
North Macedonia: Dimitrievski – Ashkovski, S. Ristovski (Bejtulai 46), Velkovski, Zajkov (Serafimov 57), Alioski; Bardhi (Da. Babunski 67), Ademi (Atanasov 58), Elmas; Trajkovski (Do. Babunski 57), Nestorovski.

Jun 19 – Trnava
Ukraine 1 (Tsygankov 72 pen)
Malta 0
Ukraine: Trubin – Konoplya, Zabarnyi, Kryvtsov, Matviyenko (Mykolenko 46); Stepanenko, Sudakov; Yarmolenko (Sydorchuk 81), Malinovskyi (Buyalskyi 63), Tsygankov (Svatok 90+5); Vanat (Dovbyk 63).
Malta: Bonello (M. Grech 45+3) – N. Muscat, S. Borg, J. Borg; J. Mbong (Degabriele 87), Guillaumier, Teuma (J. Grech 87), Yankam, Camenzuli; Jones (Dimech 62), Nwoko (Satariano 46).

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	4	4	0	0	15	1	12
Ukraine	3	2	0	1	4	4	6
Italy	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
North Macedonia	3	1	0	2	4	11	3
Malta	4	0	0	4	1	9	0

Group D

Jun 16 – Riga
Latvia 2 (Emsis 51, Tobers 90+4)
Turkey 3 (Bardakci 22, Under 61, Kahveci 90+5)
Latvia: Purins – Savalnieks, Oss, Balodis, Jurkovskis; Jaunzems (Ikaunieks 80), Tobers, Emsis, Ciganiks (Daskevics 76); Uldrikis (Regza 86); Gutkovskis (Krollis 76).
Sent off: Emsis 82.
Turkey: Gunok – Celik (Elmali 71), Demiral, Bardakci, Kadioglu (Kabak 89); Calhanoglu, Kokcu (Ozcan 78); Under, Guler (Yilmaz 71), Akturkoglu (Kahveci 89); Nayir.

Jun 16 – Cardiff
Wales 2 (D. James 10, Wilson 72)
Armenia 4 (Zelarayan 19, 75, Ranos 30, 66)
Wales: Ward – C. Roberts, Mepham, Rodon (Williams 67), B. Davies; Ampadu, Ramsey (Morrell 67), Johnson (Brooks 70), Wilson (Bradshaw 82), D. James (Broadhead 82); Moore.
Sent off: Moore 78.
Armenia: Cancarevic – Calisir (Haroyan 62), G. Harutyunyan, Mkrtchyan; Dashyan, Spertsyan, Iwu, Tiknizyan; Barseghyan (Bichakhchyan 62), Zelarayan (Briasco 76); Ranos (Serboyan 88).

Jun 19 – Yerevan
Armenia 2 (Tiknizyan 35, Barseghyan 90+1 pen)
Latvia 1 (Mkrtchyan 67 og)
Armenia: Cancarevic – Dashyan, Haroyan, G. Harutyunyan, Mkrtchyan, Tiknizyan; Briasco (Bichakhchyan 33), Spertsyan, Iwu (H. Harutyunyan 90+6), Zelarayan (Serboyan 77); Ranos (Barseghyan 77).
Latvia: Purins – Savalnieks, Oss (Stuglis 70), Balodis, Jurkovskis; Jaunzems (Tonisevs 64), Saveljevs, Tobers, Ciganiks (Daskevics 64); Uldrikis (Regza 85), Gutkovskis (Krollis 55).

Jun 19 – Samsun
Turkey 2 (Nayir 72, Guler 80)
Wales 0
Turkey: Gunok – Celik (Elmali 60), Demiral, Bardakci, Kadioglu (Kahveci 73); Calhanoglu, Ozcan (Guler 61), Kokcu (Ucan 89); Under, Yilmaz, Akturkoglu (Nayir 46).
Wales: Ward – C. Roberts, Mepham, Rodon, Williams; Morrell, Ampadu; Wilson (Broadhead 84), Ramsey (J. James 84), D. James (Bradshaw 62); Johnson (Cabango 46).
Sent off: Morrell 41.

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Turkey	4	3	0	1	7	5	9
Armenia	3	2	0	1	7	5	6
Croatia	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Wales	4	1	1	2	4	7	4
Latvia	3	0	0	3	3	6	0

Group E

Jun 17 – Tirana
Albania 2 (Asani 52, Bajrami 76)
Moldova 0
Albania: Berisha – Hysaj, Ismajli, Djimsiti, Mitaj; Bare (Asllani 68); Asani (Mehmeti 67), Ramadani, Bajrami (Muci 88), Uzuni (Seferi 88); Cikalleshi.
Moldova: Railean – Revenco (Cojocari 73), Craciun, Mudrac, Posmac, Reabciuk; Motpan (Stina 55), Baboglo (Platica 73), Rata; Nicolaescu (Postolachi 65), Damascan (Cojocaru 56).

Jun 17 – Torshavn
Faroe Islands 0
Czech Republic 3 (Krejci 15, Cerny 44, 75)
Faroe Islands: Gestsson – Rolantsson (Agnarsson 83), Faero, Vatnsdal, G. Vatnhamar, Davidesen; Bjartalio (Sorensen 58), Joensen, Andreasen (Baldvinsson 83), S. Vatnhamar (Radosavljevic 84); Knudsen (Edmundsson 58).
Czech Republic: Pavlenka – Coufal, Holes, Krejci, Jurasek; Soucek, Kral (L. Sadilek 89); Cerny (M. Sadilek 81), Hlozek (Provod 69), Jurecka (Matousek 81); Kuchta (Chytil 69).

Jun 20 – Torshavn
Faroe Islands 1 (Faero 45+1)
Albania 3 (Bajrami 20, Asllani 51, Muci 90+1)
Faroe Islands: Gestsson – Sorensen, Faero, Vatnsdal, Davidesen; Joensen (Knudsen 65), Andreasen (Bjartalio 46), G. Vatnhamar (Hendriksson 80), S. Vatnhamar (Radosavljevic 80); K. Olsen, Edmundsson (Johansen 65).
Albania: Berisha – Hysaj, Ismajli, Djimsiti, Mitaj; Ramadani, Asllani (Bare 89); Asani (Mehmeti 75), Bajrami (Muci 75), Seferi (Sadiku 84); Cikalleshi (Uzuni 67).

Jun 20 – Chisinau
Moldova 3 (Nicolaescu 48, 79, Baboglo 85)
Poland 2 (Milik 12, Lewandowski 34)
Moldova: Railean – Revenco, Craciun, Mudrac, Posmac, Reabciuk; Cojocaru, Baboglo, Dros (Motpan 46), Damascan (Postolachi 46); Nicolaescu (Cojocari 85).
Poland: Szczesny – Kedziora, Bednarek, Kiwior; Frankowski (Bereszynski 64), D. Szymanski (Linetty 83), Zalewski (Kaminski 64); S. Szymanski, Zielinski; Milik (Swiderski 73), Lewandowski.

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Czech Rep	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
Albania	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Moldova	4	1	2	1	4	5	5
Poland	3	1	0	2	4	6	3
Faroe Islands	3	0	1	2	2	7	1

Group F

Jun 17 – Baku
Azerbaijan 1 (Kryvotsyuk 62)
Estonia 1 (Sappinen 27)
Azerbaijan: Magomedaliyev – Haghverdi (Aliyev 46), Mustafazade, Guseynov, Cafarguliyev (Bayramov 46); Isayev (Ozobic 80), Camalov (Kryvotsyuk 46), Mahmudov; Emreli, Dadashov (Qurbanli 80), Sheydayev.
Estonia: Hein – Peetson, Mets, Kuusk; Lukka (Teniste 83), Miller, Kait, Vassiljev, Sinyavskiy; Anier (Ojamaa 56), Sappinen (Reinkort 83).

Jun 17 – Brussels
Belgium 1 (Lukaku 62)
Austria 1 (Mangala 21 og)
Belgium: Courtois – Faes, Dendoncker (Al Dakhil 84), Theate; Lukebakio (Bakayoko 69), Castagne, Tielemans, Mangala (Vranckx 75), Doku (Tresor 84); Carrasco (Openda 76), Lukaku.
Austria: A. Schlager – Posch, Lienhart, Alaba, Wober (Mwene 46); Baumgartner, Seiwald, X. Schlager (Ljubicic 87), Wimmer (Kainz 60); Arnautovic (Sabitzer 60), Gregoritsch (Onisiwo 87).

Jun 20 – Vienna
Austria 2 (Baumgartner 81, 89)
Sweden 0
Austria: A. Schlager – Posch (Wober 46), Lienhart, Alaba, Mwene; Wimmer (Sabitzer 59), X. Schlager (Grillitsch 71), Seiwald, Baumgartner (Ljubicic 90+1); Adamu (Arnautovic 46), Gregoritsch.
Sweden: Olsen – Wahlqvist, Hien, Lindelof, M. Olsson; Svanberg (Claesson 87), Gustafson, A. Ekdal (Karlstrom 46), Forsberg (Karlsson 77); Kulusevski (Elanga 87), Isak (Gyokeres 76).

Jun 20 – Tallinn
Estonia 0
Belgium 3 (Lukaku 37, 40, Bakayoko 90)
Estonia: Hein – Peetson, Mets, Kuusk; Teniste (Reinkort 79), Poom (Anier 61), Kait, Miller (Shein 74), Sinyavskiy; Sappinen (Sorga 74), Ojamaa (Tunjov 46).
Belgium: Sels – Castagne, Faes, Vertonghen (Al Dakhil 58), Theate (Deman 88); Vranckx (Mangala 57), Tielemans; Bakayoko, Tresor (Doku 57), Carrasco; Lukaku (Batshuayi 69).

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Austria	4	3	1	0	9	3	10
Belgium	3	2	1	0	7	1	7
Sweden	3	1	0	2	5	5	3
Estonia	3	0	1	2	2	6	1
Azerbaijan	3	0	1	2	2	10	1

Group G

Jun 17 – Kaunas
Lithuania 1 (Girdvainis 15)
Bulgaria 1 (M. Petkov 27)

Lithuania: Gertmonas – Lasickas, Lekiatas, Girdvainis, Beneta (Tutyskinas 78); Vorobjovas, Verbickas (Upstas 46); Sesplaukis (Sirvys 21), Gineitis, Jankauskas (Sirgedas 79); Cernych (Paulauskas 38).
Sent off: Lasickas17.
Bulgaria: Dyulgerov – Galchev (Stoyanov 81), A. Petkov, Antov, Gruev, M. Petkov; Despodov (Rusev 74), Chochev, Shopov (Yordanov 46), Delev (Iliev 46); Minchev (Stefanov 63).

Jun 17 – Podgorica
Montenegro 0
Hungary 0
Montenegro: Mijatovic – Vujacic, Savic, Tomasevic; Vesovic (M. Vukcevic 72), Jankovic, Scekic (Raickovic 61), Savicevic (Loncar 82); A. Vukcevic; Krstovic (Osmajic 72), Jovetic (Haksabanovic 83).
Hungary: Dibusz – Lang, Orban, A. Szalai; Bolla (Botka 88), A. Nagy, Styles (Kalmar 72), Kerkez; Sallai (Csoboth 59), Szoboszlai; Adam (B. Varga 59).

Jun 20 – Razgrad
Bulgaria 1 (Despodov 47)
Serbia 1 (Lazovic 90+6)
Bulgaria: Dyulgerov – P. Hristov, Antov, Gruev; Popov (Galchev 86), Chochev (Krastev 66), Kraev, M. Petkov; Rusev (S. Petrov 86), Iliev (Stefanov 66); Despodov (Delev 78).
Serbia: V. Milinkovic-Savic – Milenkovic, Gudelj, Pavlovic; Zivkovic (Lazovic 71), Lukic (Jovanovic 58), Maksimovic (Grujic 81), Kostic (Mladenovic 71); Tadic, S. Milinkovic-Savic; Joveljic.

Jun 20 – Budapest
Hungary 2 (Varga 32, Sallai 83)
Lithuania 0
Hungary: Dibusz – Botka, Orban, A. Szalai; Sallai (Barrath 88), A. Nagy, Styles (Kleinheisler 60), Kerkez (Ferenczi 78); Gazdag (Lang 78), Szoboszlai; B. Varga (Adam 60).
Lithuania: Gertmonas – Sesplaukis (Kucys 78), Kazukolovas, Klimavicius, Lekiatas, Tutyskinas (Beneta 63); Sirgedas (Sirvys 46), Uzela (Vorobjovas 46), Gineitis; Paulauskas, Jankauskas (Romanovskij 86).

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hungary	3	2	1	0	5	0	7
Serbia	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Montenegro	3	1	1	1	1	2	4
Bulgaria	4	0	2	2	2	6	2
Lithuania	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

Group H

Jun 16 – Helsinki
Finland 2 (Pohjanpalo 13, Antman 64)
Slovenia 0
Finland: Hradecky – Alho (Uronen 70), Hoskonen, Ivanov, Jensen (Peltola 65), Niskanen; Antman (Suhonen 79), Schuller (Kamara 79), Kairinen, Pukki (Hakans 65); Pohjanpalo.
Slovenia: Belec – Karnicnik, Brekalo, Bijol, Balkovec; Stojanovic (Verbic 78), Zajc (Elsnik 78), Cerin, Lovric (Mlakar 65); Sporar (Vipotnik 65), Sesko (Celar 86).

Jun 16 – Copenhagen
Denmark 1 (Wind 47)
Northern Ireland 0
Denmark: Schmeichel – Andersen, Kjaer, Christensen, Maehle (Stryger Larsen 73); Hojbjerg, Eriksen; Skov Olsen (Lindstrom 80), Wind (Kristensen 80), Braithwaite (Damsgaard 73); Hojlund (Daramy 90+2).
Northern Ireland: Peacock-Farrell – Bradley (McMenamin 77), McNair, Evans, Brown, Hume; McCann (Marshall 85), S. Charles (Thompson 69), Saville; Price (Taylor 77); Lavery (D. Charles 69).

Jun 16 – Parma
San Marino 0
Kazakhstan 3 (Vorogovskiy 37, Tagybergen 64 pen, Zaynutdinov 90+5)
San Marino: E. Benedettini – Fabbri (Cevoli 82), Di Maio, Rossi; Ma. Battistini, Lazzari, A. Golinucci, Capicchioni (Vitaioli 81), Tosi (Hirsch 65); Nanni (Mi. Battistini, 80), Berardi (Ceccaroli 65).
Kazakhstan: Shatskiy – Gabyshev (Skvortsov 78), Bystrov, Marochkin, Alip, Vorogovskiy (Dosmagambetov 78); Kuat, Beisebekov (Zaynutdinov 57), Tagybergen (Kenesov 71); Orazov, Samorodov (Astanov 71).

Jun 19 – Helsinki
Finland 6 (Kamara 16, Kallman 39, Hakans 65, 72, 74, Pukki 76)
San Marino 0
Finland: Hradecky – Alho (Soiri 81), Ivanov, Tomas, Uronen (Pallas 46); Suhonen, Schuller (Taylor 60), Kamara; Antman (Hakans 61), Pohjanpalo (Pukki 60), Kallman.
San Marino: E. Benedettini – Fabbri, Di Maio (Franciosi 89), Rossi; S'Addario, Lunadei (Mularoni 66), Mi. Battistini (E. Golinucci 79), A. Golinucci, Tosi (Ma. Battistini 78); Nanni, Berardi (Vitaioli 66).

Jun 19 – Belfast
Northern Ireland 0
Kazakhstan 1 (Aymbetov 88)
Northern Ireland: Peacock-Farrell – Hume, McNair, Evans (McMenamin 64), Cathcart, Thompson (Brown 84); McCann (Taylor 71), S. Charles, Saville; Price, D. Charles (Lavery 72).
Kazakhstan: Shatskiy – Gabyshev (Skvortsov 68), Bystrov, Marochkin, Alip, Vorogovskiy; Zaynutdinov (Kuat 75), Beisebekov, Tagybergen (Tapalov 81); Orazov (Astanov 81), Samorodov (Aymbetov 80).

Jun 19 – Ljubljana
Slovenia 1 (Sporar 25)
Denmark 1 (Hojlund 42)
Slovenia: Vidovsek – Karnicnik, Brekalo, Bijol, Janza; Stojanovic, Cerin, Elsnik, Mlakar (Verbic 90+3); Sporar (Vipotnik 81), Sesko.
Denmark: Schmeichel – Christensen, Kjaer, Zanka Jorgensen; Bah, Hojbjerg, Eriksen, Stryger Larsen (Kristiansen 84); Skov Olsen (Poulsen 71), Hojlund (Braithwaite 71), Wind (Damsgaard 58).

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Finland	4	3	0	1	10	3	9
Kazakhstan	4	3	0	1	8	4	9
Denmark	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Slovenia	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Northern Ireland	4	1	0	3	2	3	3
San Marino	4	0	0	4	0	13	0

Group I

Jun 16 – Andorra la Vella
Andorra 1 (M. Vieira 67)
Switzerland 2 (Freuler 7, Amdouni 32)
Andorra: Alvarez – C. Rubio (M. Garcia 23), Llovera, Guillen (Lima 86), Alavedra, San Nicolas; Alaez (A. Martinez 64), Rebes (M. Vieira 65), Vales, Cervos; Berto (Cucu 64).
Switzerland: Kobel – Fernandes, Akanji, Elvedi, Rodriguez; Freuler, Zakaria (Sow 74), Xhaka; Shaqiri (Steffen 61), Amdouni (Zeqiri 61), Vargas (Zuber 61).

Jun 16 – Budapest
Belarus 1 (Ebong 16)
Israel 2 (Weissman 85 pen, Gloukh 90+2)
Belarus: Ignatovich – Bykov, Politevich, Polyakov, Pechenin; Kovalev (Bocherov 64), Selyava (Yablonskiy 57), Kaplenko (Klimovich 79), Yuzepchuk; Morozov (Bakhar 46), Ebong (Savitskiy 79).
Israel: Glazer – Dasa (Yehezkel 78), Shlomo, Goldberg, Davidzada; Safouri (Gloukh 57), Do. Peretz (Kanichowsky 66), Abu Fani; Abada (Haziza 46), Baribo (Weismann 46), Solomon.

Jun 16 – Prishtina
Kosovo 0
Romania 0
Kosovo: Muric – Vojvoda, Rrahmani, Aliti, Paqarada; Dresevic (Kryeziu 73), Fazliji; Rashica (Zhegrova 46), Celina, Muslija (Topalli 82); Muriqi.
Romania: Moldovan – Manea, Dragusin, Burca, Camora (Sorescu 23); M. Marin, Baluta, Stanciu (Hagi 86); Man (Morutan 61), Puscas (Alibec 86), Coman (Mihaila 62).

Jun 19 – Budapest
Belarus 2 (Morozov 73, Ebong 75)
Kosovo 1 (Muriqi 87 pen)
Belarus: Ignatovich – Bykov, Volkov, Polyakov, Pechenin (Malkevich 88); Kaplenko; Yuzepchuk (Kovalev 62), Yablonskiy (Klimovich 88), Bocherov (Selyava 65), Ebong; Savitskiy (Morozov 63).
Kosovo: Muric – Vojvoda, Rrahmani, Aliti, Paqarada (Krasniqi 25); Fazliji (Kryeziu 53), Dresevic (Zhegrova 46); Rrudhani, Celina (Loshaj 79), Muslija; Muriqi.

Jun 19 – Jerusalem
Israel 2 (Shlomo 42, Solomon 61)
Andorra 1 (Berto 52)
Israel: Glazer – Dasa, Shlomo, Goldberg, Revivo; Safouri (Gloukh 57), Lavi, Kanichowsky (Abu Fani 76); Haziza (Yehezkel 57), Weismann (Baribo 75), Solomon.
Andorra: Alvarez – San Nicolas, Llovera, Guillen, Alavedra, M. Garcia (A. Martinez 89); Alaez (Fernandez 81), Vales (M. Pujol 90), M. Vieira (Rebes 81), Cervos; Berto (Cucu 67).

Jun 19 – Luzern
Switzerland 2 (Amdouni 28, 41)
Romania 2 (Mihaila 89, 90+2)
Switzerland: Sommer – Fernandes (Schar 90+1), Akanji, Elvedi, Rodriguez; Freuler, Zakaria (Sow 75), Xhaka; Shaqiri (Bislimi 90), Amdouni (Seferovic 59), Vargas (Steffen 75).
Romania: Moldovan – Manea, Nedelcearu, Dragusin, Burca, Sorescu (Olaru 73); Screciu (Cicaldau 84), Stanciu; Hagi (Mihaila 57), Alibec (Puscas 73), Coman (Morutan 58).

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Switzerland	4	3	1	0	12	3	10
Romania	4	2	2	0	6	3	8
Israel	4	2	1	1	5	6	7
Belarus	4	1	0	3	4	10	3
Kosovo	4	0	3	1	3	4	3
Andorra	4	0	0	3	3	7	1

Group J

Jun 17 – Luxembourg
Luxembourg 2 (Da. Sinani 59, Rodrigues 89)
Liechtenstein 0
Luxembourg: Moris – M. Martins (Dzogovic 90), Mahmutovic, Chanot, Jans (Bohnert 46); V. Thill (Rodrigues 46), C. Martins, Barreiro, Borges Sanches (Rupil 90); Da. Sinani, Curci (Olesen 46).
Liechtenstein: Buchel – Beck, Traber, Malin; Meier (Netzer 55), Hasler (S. Wolfinger 24), Luchinger (Hofer 75), Sele, Goppel (F. Wolfinger 75); Saglam (Yildiz 55), Salanovic.

Jun 17 – Reykjavik
Iceland 1 (Finnbogason 41 pen)
Slovakia 2 (Kucka 27, Suslov 69)
Iceland: Runarsson – Sampsted (S. Magnusson 81), Ingason, H. Magnusson, Fridriksson; Willumsson, Palsson, J. Gudmundsson; A. Gudmundsson, Finnbogason (Haraldsson 63), Thorsteinsson (Ellertsson 63).
Slovakia: Dubravka – Pekarik, Vavro, Skriniar, Hancko; Kucka, Lobotka, Hamsik (Bero 81); Schranz (Duris 81), Polievka (Bozenik 57), Mak (Suslov 57).

Jun 17 – Lisbon
Portugal 3 (B. Silva 44, Fernandes 77, 90+3)
Bosnia & Herzegovina 0
Portugal: Costa – A. Silva, Dias, Danilo; Cancelo, Palhinha (Jota 87), Fernandes, Guerreiro (Semedo 78); B. Silva (Otavio 87), Ronaldo, Felix (Neves 62).
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Sehic – Dedic, Barisic (Hamulic 71), Ahmedhodzic, Sanicanin, Kolasinac (Gazibegovic 79); Cimirot, Pjanic (Prcic 78), Hadziahmetovic (Tahirovic 71); Stevanovic, Dzeko (Varesanovic 79).

Jun 20 – Zenica
Bosnia & Herzegovina 0
Luxembourg 2 (Borges Sanches 4, Da. Sinani 74)
Bosnia & Herzegovina: Sehic – Dedic, Barisic, Sanicanin, Kolasinac; Stevanovic (Menalo 72), Tahirovic (Hadziahmetovic 46), Cimirot (Prevljak 72); Pjanic; Kodro (Hamulic 46), Dzeko.
Luxembourg: Moris – Jans, Mahmutovic, Chanot, Bohnert; Olesen, C. Martins, Barreiro, Borges Sanches (Carlson 83); Da. Sinani (De. Sinani 90+2); Curci (M. Martins 58).

Jun 20 – Reykjavik
Iceland 0
Portugal 1 (Ronaldo 89)
Iceland: Runarsson – Fridriksson (Sampsted 79), Palsson, Ingason, H. Magnusson; Willumsson, Traustason (Bergmann Johannesson 75), J. Gudmundsson, Thorsteinsson (Haraldsson 79); A. Gudmundsson, Finnbogason (S. Magnusson 75).
Sent off: Willumsson 80.
Portugal: Costa – Dias, Pepe, Danilo (Otavio 84); Dalot, Neves (Inacio 67), Fernandes (Vitinha 84), Cancelo (Guerreiro 67); B. Silva (Jota 90+3), Ronaldo, Leao.

Jun 20 – Vaduz
Liechtenstein 0
Slovakia 1 (Vavro 45+1)
Liechtenstein: Buchel – Beck, Traber, Hofer; S. Wolfinger (Graber 62), F. Wolfinger (Meier 62), Luchinger (Haas 77), Sele (Hasler 90), Goppel; Saglam (Gassner 77), Salanovic.
Slovakia: Dubravka – Pekarik, Vavro (Gyomber 89), Skriniar, Hancko; Kucka, Lobotka (Hrosovsky 89), Hamsik (Bero 77); Suslov, Polievka (Strelec 77), Mak (Duris 63).

Current Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal	4	4	0	0	14	0	12
Slovakia	4	3	1	0	5	1	10
Luxembourg	4	2	1	1	4	6	7
Bosnia & Herz.	4	1	0	3	3	7	3
Iceland	4	1	0	3	8	6	3
Liechtenstein	4	0	0	4	0	14	0

2023 CONCACAF GOLD CUP

Prelims

First Round

Jun 16 – Fort Lauderdale
Antigua & Barbuda 0
Guadeloupe 5 (Solvet 28, Tell 45+4, Davidas 66, Archimede 70, Phaeton 90+3)

Jun 16– Fort Lauderdale
Martinique 3 (Fabien 18, Labeau 74, Burner 86)
Saint Lucia 1 (Hackett-Fairchild 40)

Jun 16 – Fort Lauderdale
Curacao 1 (Locadia 22)
Saint Kitts & Nevis 1 (Terrell 83)
Saint Kitts & Nevis win 3-2 on penalties

Jun 17 – Fort Lauderdale
French Guiana 4 (Abelinti 28 pen, 49, Lo. Baal 44, Nemouthe 75)
Sint Maarten 1 (Amatkarijo 40)

Jun 17 – Fort Lauderdale
Suriname 0
Puerto Rico 0
Puerto Rico win 4-3 on penalties

Jun 17 – Fort Lauderdale
Guyana 1 (Glasgow 22)
Grenada 1 (Mitchell 60)
Guyana win 5-3 on penalties

Second Round

Jun 20 – Fort Lauderdale
Guadeloupe 2 (Gordon 18 og, Gravillon 57)
Guyana 0

Jun 20 – Fort Lauderdale
Martinique 2 (Labeau 52, Fortune 90+5)
Puerto Rico 0

Jun 20 – Fort Lauderdale
Saint Kitts & Nevis 1 (T. Williams 41)
French Guiana 1 (Abelinti 53 pen)
Saint Kitts & Nevis win 4-2 on penalties

Finals

Group A

Jun 24 – Chicago
United States 1 (Vazquez 88)
Jamaica 1 (Lowe 13)

Jun 25 – Fort Lauderdale
Trinidad & Tobago 3 (A. Jones 43, Fortune 65, Ible 73 og)
Saint Kitts & Nevis 0

Jun 28 – St Louis
Jamaica 4 (Gray 14, 30, Bailey 18, Richards 90+2)
Trinidad & Tobago 1 (Rampersad 49)

Jun 28 – St Louis
Saint Kitts & Nevis 0
United States 6 (Mihailovic 12, 79, Reynolds 14, Ferreira 16, 25, 50)

Jul 2 – Charlotte
United States 6 (Ferreira 14, 38, 45+3 pen, Cowell 65, Busio 79, Vazquez 90+4)
Trinidad & Tobago 0

Jul 2 – Santa Clara
Jamaica 5 (Archibald 30 og, Russell 45+2, Bernard 49, Johnson 72, Burke 74)
Saint Kitts & Nevis 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
USA (Q)	3	2	1	0	13	1	7
Jamaica (Q)	3	2	1	0	10	2	7
Trinidad & Tobago	3	1	0	2	4	10	3
St Kitts & Nevis	3	0	0	3	0	14	0

Group B

Jun 25 – Houston
Haiti 2 (Nazon 45+1 pen, Pierrot 90+7)
Qatar 1 (Abdurisag 20)

Jun 25 – Houston
Mexico 4 (Romo 1, 23, Pineda 52, Chavez 64)
Honduras 0

Jun 29 – Glendale
Qatar 1 (Al Abdullah 7)
Honduras 1 (Elis 90+6)

Jun 29 – Glendale
Haiti 1 (Jean Jacques 78)
Mexico 3 (Martin 46, Ade 56 og, Gimenez 83)

Jul 2 – Charlotte
Honduras 2 (Bengtson 42, Pinto 59)
Haiti 1 (Pierrot 20)

Jul 2 – Santa Clara
Mexico 0
Qatar 1 (Shehata 27)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico (Q)	3	2	0	1	7	2	6
Qatar (Q)	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Honduras	3	1	1	1	3	6	4
Haiti	3	1	0	2	4	6	3

Group C

Jun 26 – Fort Lauderdale
El Salvador 1 (Tamacas 90+5 pen)
Martinique 2 (Burner 11, Fortune 16)

Jun 26 – Fort Lauderdale
Costa Rica 1 (Suarez 90+1)
Panama 2 (Fajardo 23, Barcenas 68)

Jun 30 – Harrison
Martinique 1 (Fabien 90+5)
Panama 2 (Fajardo 57, Murillo 69)

Jun 30 – Harrison
El Salvador 0
Costa Rica 0

Jul 4 – Harrison
Costa Rica 6 (Waston 10, Calvo 41, Vargas 55, Campbell 59 pen, Contreras 68, Campos 90)
Martinique 4 (Burner 18, 79, Labeau 75 pen, Mexique 90+3)

Jul 4 – Houston
Panama 2 (Escobar 26, Diaz 71)
El Salvador 2 (B. Gil 4, M. Gil 90+1)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panama (Q)	3	2	1	0	6	4	7
Costa Rica (Q)	3	1	1	1	7	6	4
Martinique	3	1	0	2	7	9	3
El Salvador	3	0	2	1	3	4	2

Group D

Jun 27 – Toronto
Canada 2 (Cavallini 49, Lina 70 og)
Guadeloupe 2 (Ambrose 23, Russell-Rowe 90+3 og)

Jun 27 – Fort Lauderdale
Guatemala 1 (Lom 48)
Cuba 0

Jul 1 – Houston
Cuba 1 (A. Hernandez 62 pen)
Guadeloupe 4 (Phaeton 13, 43, Plumain 41, Baron 50)

Jul 1 – Houston
Guatemala 0
Canada 0

Jul 4 – Harrison
Guadeloupe 2 (Gravillon 27, Plumain 63 pen)
Guatemala 3 (Rubin 39, 70, Mejia 76)

Jul 4 – Houston
Canada 4 (Hoilett 21 pen, Osorio 27, Nelson 47, Millar 62)
Cuba 2 (Paradela 45+4 pen, Reyes 89 pen)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guatemala (Q)	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Canada (Q)	3	1	2	0	6	4	5
Guadeloupe	3	1	1	1	8	6	4
Cuba	3	0	0	3	3	9	0

Quarter-Finals

Jul 8 – Arlington
Panama 4 (Barcenas 19, Diaz 56, 63, 65)
Qatar 0

Jul 8 – Arlington
Mexico 2 (Pineda 52 pen, E. Sanchez 87)
Costa Rica 0

Jul 9 – Cincinnati
Guatemala 0
Jamaica 1 (Bell 51)

Jul 9 – Cincinnati
United States 2 (Vazquez 88, Kennedy 114 og)
Canada 2 (Vitoria 90+3 pen, Shaffelburg 109)
After Extra-Time. USA win 3-2 on penalties

Semi-Finals

Jul 12 – San Diego
United States 1 (Ferreira 105)
Panama 1 (I. Anderson 99)
After Extra-Time. Panama win 5-4 on penalties

Jul 12 – Paradise
Jamaica 0
Mexico 3 (Martin 2, Chavez 30, Alvarado 90+3)

Final

Jul 16 – Inglewood
Mexico 1 (Gimenez 88)
Panama 0
Mexico: Ochoa – J. Sanchez, Montes, Vasquez, Gallardo; Romo, Alvarez, Chavez (E. Sanchez 75); Antuna (Alvarado 75), Martin (Gimenez 85), Pineda (Reyes 90+2).
Panama: Mosquera – Escobar, Cummings (Londono 90+1), Andrade; Barcenas, Carrasquilla, Godoy, Davis (I. Anderson 62); Fajardo, Quintero (Waterman 61), Diaz.

2023 SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP

Group A

Jun 21 – Bangalore
Kuwait 3 (El Ebrahim 23, Al Khaldi 42, Daham 65 pen)
Nepal 1 (Bista 69)

Jun 21 – Bangalore
India 4 (Chhetri 10, 16 pen, 75 pen, Kumam 81)
Pakistan 0

Jun 24 – Bangalore
Pakistan 0
Kuwait 4 (Al Enezi 10, Al Faneeni 17, 45+1, Al Rasheedi 69)

Jun 24 – Bangalore
Nepal 0
India 2 (Chhetri 62, N. M. Singh 70)

Jun 27 – Bangalore
Nepal 1 (Chaudhary 80)
Pakistan 0

Jun 27 – Bangalore
India 1 (Chhetri 45+2)
Kuwait 1 (A. Ali 90+2 og)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kuwait (Q)	3	2	1	0	8	2	7
India (Q)	3	2	1	0	7	1	7
Nepal	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Pakistan	3	0	0	3	0	9	0

Group B

Jun 22 – Bangalore
Lebanon 2 (Maatouk 80, Bader 90+6)
Bangladesh 0

Jun 22 – Bangalore
Maldives 2 (Mohamed 6 pen, N. Hassan 90)
Bhutan 0

Jun 25 – Bangalore
Bangladesh 3 (Rakib 42, Kazi 67, Morsalin 90)
Maldives 1 (Hamza 18)

Jun 25 – Bangalore
Bhutan 1 (Gyeltshen 79)
Lebanon 4 (Sadek 11, Al Haj 23, Bader 35, M. Zein 42)

Jun 28 – Bangalore
Lebanon 1 (Maatouk 24)
Maldives 0

Jun 28 – Bangalore
Bhutan 1 (Dorji 12)
Bangladesh 3 (Morsalin 21, Jigme 31 og, Rakib 36)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lebanon (Q)	3	3	0	0	7	1	9
Bangladesh (Q)	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
Maldives	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Bhutan	3	0	0	3	2	9	0

Semi-Finals

Jul 1 – Bangalore
Kuwait 1 (Al Buloushi 105+2)
Bangladesh 0
After Extra-Time

Jul 1 – Bangalore
Lebanon 0
India 0
After Extra-Time. India win 4-2 on penalties

Final

Jul 4 – Bangalore
Kuwait 1 (Khaldi 14)
India 1 (Chhangte 36)
After Extra-Time. India win 5-4 on penalties

2023 COSAFA CUP

Group A

Jul 5 – Umlazi
Eswatini 0
Botswana 1 (Ditsele 22)

Jul 5 – Umlazi
South Africa 1 (Human 48)
Namibia 1 (Kambindu 43)

Jul 8 – Umlazi
South Africa 2 (Rayners 66 pen, Mogaila 67)
Botswana 1 (Kgamanyane 63)

Jul 8 – Umlazi
Namibia 1 (Limbondi 34)
Eswatini 2 (Matse 41, Matsebula 44)

Jul 11 – Durban
Namibia 0
Botswana 0

Jul 11 – KwaMashu
South Africa 2 (Mabasa 76, 88)
Eswatini 1 (Matsebula 51)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Africa (Q)	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Botswana	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Eswatini	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Namibia	3	0	2	1	2	3	2

Group B

Jul 6 – Umlazi
Seychelles 0
Comoros 3 (Djambae 27, Djoudja 39, Bacar 59)

Jul 6 – Umlazi
Zambia 0
Malawi 1 (Katebe 17 og)

Jul 9 – Umlazi
Zambia 2 (Mulambia 51, Kangwanda 74)
Comoros 1 (Djambae 67)

Jul 9 – Umlazi
Malawi 2 (Nkhoma 55, Kumwembe 65)
Seychelles 0

Jul 11 – Durban
Malawi 2 (Kaonga 30 pen, Mwaungulu 36)
Comoros 0

Jul 11 – KwaMashu
Seychelles 2 (Labrosse 81, Mellie 90 pen)
Zambia 4 (Kangwanda 11, Kanguluma 54, Mashata 58, Mulambia 74)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Malawi (Q)	3	3	0	0	5	0	9
Zambia (Q)	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
Comoros	3	1	0	2	4	4	3
Seychelles	3	0	0	3	2	9	0

Group C

Jul 7 – Umlazi
Mauritius 0
Lesotho 2 (Mokhachane 15, Sera 90+2)

Jul 7 – Umlazi
Mozambique 1 (Antonio 83)
Angola 1 (Benarfa 3)

Jul 10 – KwaMashu
Angola 0
Mauritius 1 (Francois 8)

Jul 10 – KwaMashu
Mozambique 0
Lesotho 1 (Mokhachane 34)

Jul 12 – Durban
Angola 4 (Cangue 20, Moises 29, Manu 50, Apado 88)
Lesotho 2 (Makha 3, Mokokoane 44)

Jul 12 – KwaMashu
Mauritius 0
Mozambique 1 (Abudo 38)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lesotho (Q)	3	2	0	1	5	4	6
Angola	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Mozambique	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Mauritius	3	1	0	2	1	3	3

Semi-Finals

Jul 14 – Umlazi
Malawi 1 (Kaonga 26 pen)
Lesotho 1 (Thabantso 18)
Lesotho win 3-0 on penalties

Jul 14 – Umlazi
South Africa 1 (Mabasa 44)
Zambia 2 (Mashata 50, Kangwanda 69)

Third Place Play-Off

Jul 16 – Umlazi
Malawi 0
South Africa 0
South Africa win 5-3 on penalties

Final

Jul 16 – Umlazi
Lesotho 0
Zambia 1 (Libamba 78)

Club Football
EUROPE

2023-24 UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Qualifying Rounds

Preliminary Round Semi-Finals

Jun 27: Atletic Club d'Escaldes (And) 0-3 Buducnost Podgorica (Mne); Tre Penne (Smr) 1-7 Breidablik (Isl)

Preliminary Round Final

Jun 30: Buducnost Podgorica (Mne) 0-5 Breidablik (Isl)

First Qualifying Round

Jul 11: Ballkani (Kos) 2-0 Ludogorets (Bul); Shamrock Rovers (Irl) 0-1 Breidablik (Isl); Urartu (Arm) 0-1 Zrinjski Mostar (Bih); Zalgiris (Ltu) 0-0 Struga (Mkd); Lincoln Red Imps (Gib) 1-2 Qarabag (Aze); Rakow Czestochowa (Pol) 1-0 Flora (Est); Hamrun Spartans (Mlt) 0-4 Maccabi Haifa (Isr); Partizani (Alb) 1-1 BATE Borisov (Blr); KI (Fro) 0-0 Ferencvaros (Hun); Olimpija Ljubljana (Svn) 2-1 Valmiera (Lva)
Jul 12: BK Hacken (Swe) 3-1 The New

Saints (Wal); HJK (Fin) 1-0 Larne (Nir); Slovan Bratislava (Svk) 1-1 Swift Hesperange (Lux); Farul Constanta (Rou) 1-0 Sheriff Tiraspol (Mda); Astana (Kaz) 1-1 Dinamo Tbilisi (Geo)
Jul 18: Breidablik (Isl) 2-1 Shamrock Rovers (Irl) (agg 3-1); The New Saints (Wal) 0-2 BK Hacken (Swe) (agg 1-5); Struga (Mkd) 1-2 Zalgiris (Ltu) (agg 1-2); Flora (Est) 0-3 Rakow Czestochowa (Pol) (agg 0-4); Sheriff Tiraspol (Mda) 3-0 Farul Constanta (Rou) (agg 3-1); Maccabi Haifa (Isr) 2-1 Hamrun Spartans (Mlt) (agg 6-1); Zrinjski Mostar (Bih) 2-3 Urartu (Arm) (*AET*, agg p3-3); BATE Borisov (Blr) 2-0 Partizani (Alb) (agg 3-1)
Jul 19: Ludogorets (Bul) 4-0 Ballkani (Kos) (agg 4-2); Ferencvaros (Hun) 0-3 KI (Fro) (agg 0-3); Valmiera (Lva) 1-2 Olimpija Ljubljana (Svn) (agg 2-4); Larne (Nir) 2-2 HJK (Fin) (*AET*, agg 2-3); Qarabag (Aze) 4-0 Lincoln Red Imps (Gib) (agg 6-1); Swift Hesperange (Lux) 0-2 Slovan Bratislava (Svk) (agg 1-3); Dinamo Tbilisi (Geo) 1-2 Astana (Kaz) (agg 2-3)

2023-24 UEFA CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Qualifying Rounds

First Qualifying Round

Jul 12: F91 Dudelange (Lux) 2-1 St Patrick's Athletic (Irl); B36 Torshavn (Fro) 0-0 Paide Linnameeskond (Est)
Jul 13: Sutjeska Niksic (Mne) 1-0 Cosmos (Smr); Domzale (Svn) 1-4 Balzan (Mlt); Vaduz (Lie) 1-2 Neman Grodno (Blr); Ararat-Armenia (Arm) 1-1 Egnatia (Alb); Torpedo Kutaisi (Geo) 2-2 Sarajevo (Bih); Alashkert (Arm) 1-1 Arsenal Tivat (Mne); Zeljeznicar (Bih) 2-2 Dinamo Minsk (Blr); La Fiorita (Smr) 1-1 Zimbru Chisinau (Mda); Maribor (Svn) 1-1 Birkirkara (Mlt); Tirana (Alb) 1-1 Dinamo Batumi (Geo); Bruno's Magpies (Gib) 0-0 Dundalk (Irl); Inter Club d'Escaldes (And) 2-1 Vikingur (Fro); Progres Niederkorn (Lux) 2-2 Gjilani (Kos); Linfield (Nir) 3-1 Vllaznia (Alb); KA (Isl) 2-0 Connah's Quay Nomads (Wal); Shkendija (Mkd) 1-0 Haverfordwest County (Wal); Haka (Fin) 2-2 Crusaders (Nir); HB Torshavn (Fro) 0-0 Derry City (Irl); Riga (Lva) 2-0 Vikingur Reykjavik (Isl); Zilina (Svk) 2-1 FCI Levadia (Est); Pyunik (Arm) 2-0 Narva Trans (Est); Panevezys (Ltu) 2-2 Milsami Orhei (Mda); Tobol (Kaz) 2-1 Honka (Fin); DAC (Svk) 2-1 Dila Gori (Geo); FK Makedonija (Mkd) 0-1 RFS (Lva); Dukagjini (Kos) 2-1 Europa (Gib); Penybont (Wal) 1-1 Santa Coloma (And); Hegelmann (Ltu) 0-5 Shkupi (Mkd); Gzira United (Mlt) 2-2 Glentoran (Nir)
Jul 18: Balzan (Mlt) 1-3 Domzale (Svn) (agg 5-4)
Jul 20: Paide Linnameeskond (Est) 0-2 B36 Torshavn (Fro) (agg 0-2); Cosmos (Smr) 1-1 Sutjeska Niksic (Mne) (agg 1-2); Neman Grodno (Blr) 1-1 Vaduz (Lie) (agg 3-2); Egnatia (Alb) 4-4 Ararat-Armenia (Arm) (*AET*, agg 5-5p); Sarajevo (Bih) 1-1 Torpedo Kutaisi (Geo) (*AET*, agg 3-3p); Arsenal Tivat (Mne) 1-6 Alashkert (Arm) (agg 2-7); Dinamo Minsk (Blr) 1-2 Zeljeznicar (Bih) (agg 3-4); Zimbru Chisinau (Mda) 1-0 La Fiorita (Smr) (agg 2-1); Birkirkara (Mlt) 1-2 Maribor (Svn) (agg 2-3); Dinamo Batumi (Geo) 1-2 Tirana (Alb) (agg 2-3); Dundalk (Irl) 3-1 Bruno's Magpies (Gib) (agg 3-1); Vikingur (Fro) 1-1 Inter Club d'Escaldes (And) (agg 2-3); Gjilani (Kos) 0-2 Progres Niederkorn (Lux) (agg 2-4); Vllaznia (Alb) 1-0 Linfield (Nir) (agg 2-3); Connah's Quay Nomads (Wal) 0-2 KA (Isl) (agg 0-4); Haverfordwest County (Wal) 1-0 Shkendija (Mkd) (*AET*, agg p1-1); Crusaders (Nir) 1-0 Haka (Fin) (agg 3-2); Derry City (Irl) 1-0 HB Torshavn (Fro) (agg 1-0); Vikingur Reykjavik (Isl) 1-0 Riga (Lva) (agg 1-2); FCI Levadia (Est) 1-2 Zilina (Svk) (agg 2-4); Narva Trans (Est) 0-3 Pyunik (Arm) (agg 0-5); Milsami Orhei (Mda) 0-1 Panevezys (Ltu) (agg 2-3); Honka (Fin) 0-0 Tobol (Kaz) (agg 1-2); Dila Gori (Geo) 2-0 DAC (Svk) (agg 3-2); RFS (Lva) 4-1 FK Makedonija (Mkd) (agg 5-1); Europa (Gib) 2-3 Dukagjini (Kos) (agg 3-5); Santa Coloma (And) 2-0 Penybont (Wal) (agg 3-1); Shkupi (Mkd) 0-0 Hegelmann (Ltu) (agg 5-0); Glentoran (Nir) 1-1 Gzira United (Mlt) (*AET*, agg 3-3p); St Patrick's Athletic (Irl) 2-3 F91 Dudelange (Lux) (agg 3-5)

2023 UEFA-CONMEBOL CLUB CHALLENGE

Jul 19 – Seville
Sevilla (Spa) 1 (Ortiz 90+1)
Independiente del Valle (Ecu) 1 (Diaz 10)
Sevilla win 4-1 on penalties

SOUTH AMERICA

2023 COPA LIBERTADORES

Group A

Jun 28 – Rio deJaneiro
Flamengo (Bra) 4 (Pedro 9, Leo Pereira 30, Bruno Henrique 42, Victor Hugo 55)
Aucas (Ecu) 0

Jun 28 – Avellaneda
Racing (Arg) 4 (M. Rojas 50, Hauche 54, Moreno 71, Piovi 86)
Nublense (Chi) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Racing	6	4	1	1	13	6	13
Flamengo	6	3	2	1	11	5	11
Nublense	6	1	2	3	3	10	5
Aucas	6	1	1	4	6	12	4

Group B

Jun 28 – Montevideo
Nacional (Uru) 1 (Polenta 40)
Metropolitanos (Ven) 0

Jun 28 – Porto Alegre
Internacional (Bra) 3 (Mauricio 3, Luiz Adriano 22, 27)
Independiente Medellin (Col) 1 (Pons 50)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Internacional	6	3	3	0	10	6	12
Nacional	6	3	2	1	9	7	11
Ind Medellin	6	3	1	2	10	9	10
Metropolitanos	6	0	0	6	4	11	0

Group C

Jun 29 – Sao Paulo
Palmeiras (Bra) 4 (Rony 24, Artur 34, 85, Piquerez 76)
Bolivar (Bol) 0

Jun 29 – Guayaquil
Barcelona (Ecu) 2 (Corozo 57, Bauman 87 pen)
Cerro Porteno (Par) 2 (Bobadilla 2, Aquino 43 pen)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palmeiras	6	5	0	1	16	6	15
Bolivar	6	4	0	2	11	7	12
Barcelona	6	1	1	4	7	12	4
Cerro Porteno	6	1	1	4	5	14	4

Group D

Jun 27 – Buenos Aires
River Plate (Arg) 2 (Aliendro 13, Borja 90)
The Strongest (Bol) 0

Jun 27 – Rio deJaneiro
Fluminense (Bra) 1 (Can 22)
Sporting Cristal (Per) 1 (Brenner 27)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fluminense	6	3	1	2	10	6	10
River Plate	6	3	1	2	11	11	10
Sporting Cristal	6	2	2	2	8	10	8
The Strongest	6	2	0	4	5	7	6

Group E

Jun 28 – Quito
Independiente del Valle (Ecu) 3 (Faravelli 23, Diaz 48, Rodriguez 90)
Argentinos Juniors (Arg) 2 (Carabajal 44 og, Heredia 87)

Jun 28 – Sao Paulo
Corinthians (Bra) 3 (Araujo 32, Felipe Augusto 64, Adson 80)
Liverpool (Uru) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ind del Valle	6	4	0	2	10	5	12
Argentinos Juniors	6	3	2	1	8	6	11
Corinthians	6	2	1	3	7	6	7
Liverpool	6	1	1	4	4	12	4

Group F

Jun 29 – Buenos Aires
Boca Juniors (Arg) 4 (Weigandt 39, Barco 61, Vazquez 86, 89)
Monagas (Ven) 0

Jun 29 – Santiago
Colo-Colo (Chi) 0
Deportivo Pereira (Col) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors	6	4	1	1	9	2	13
Deportivo Pereira	6	2	2	2	5	5	8
Colo-Colo	6	1	3	2	3	5	6
Monagas	6	1	2	3	3	8	5

Group G

Jun 27 – Curitiba
Athletico Paranaense (Bra) 3 (Bueno 8, Vitor Roque 63, 88)
Alianza Lima (Per) 0

Jun 27 – Asuncion
Libertad (Par) 1 (Bareiro 61)
Atletico Mineiro (Bra) 1 (Gomes 68)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Athletico Paranaense	6	4	1	1	9	4	13
Atletico Mineiro	6	3	1	2	7	5	10
Libertad	6	2	1	3	6	7	7
Alianza Lima	6	1	1	4	3	9	4

Group H

Jun 27 – Asuncion
Olimpia (Par) 4 (Silva 2 pen, Paiva 9, 23, Cardozo 31)
Melgar (Per) 1 (Martinez 54)

Jun 27 – Medellin
Atletico Nacional (Col) 0
Patronato (Arg) 1 (C. Gonzalez 81)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia	6	4	2	0	13	4	14
Atletico Nacional	6	3	1	2	8	8	10
Patronato	6	2	0	4	6	11	6
Melgar	6	1	1	4	9	13	4

● *All final standings. The top two teams from each group progress to the last 16, with the third-placed teams entering the Copa Sudamericana play-offs*

2023 COPA SUDAMERICANA

Group A

Jun 29 – Quito
LDU (Ecu) 3 (Julio 29, Alvarado 76, Alzugaray 88)
Universidad Cesar Vallejo (Per) 0

Jun 29 – Rio deJaneiro
Botafogo (Bra) 1 (Freitas 19)
Magallanes (Chi) 1 (Zapata 80)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU	6	3	3	0	10	2	12
Botafogo	6	2	4	0	10	5	10
Magallanes	6	0	4	2	8	13	4
U Cesar Vallejo	6	1	1	4	8	16	4

Group B

Jun 28 – Guayaquil
Emelec (Ecu) 2 (Carabali 36, Lastre 64)
Danubio (Uru) 1 (Vera 68)

Jun 28 – Asuncion
Guarani (Par) 2 (Santander 29 pen, Camacho 43 pen)
Huracan (Arg) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guarani	6	3	2	1	9	7	11
Emelec	6	2	3	1	7	7	9
Danubio	6	2	1	3	6	7	7
Huracan	6	1	2	3	7	8	5

Group C

Jun 28 – La Plata
Estudiantes (Arg) 4 (Boselli 29, Carrillo 30, Rollheiser 62, Mancuso 90+5)
Oriente Petrolero (Bol) 0

Jun 28 – Braganca
Red Bull Bragantino (Bra) 7 (Sorriso 6, 29, Lucas Evangelista 19, Eduardo Sasha 21, 48, 49, Borbas 87)
Tacuary (Par) 1 (Ruiz 39)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Red Bull Bragantino	6	4	2	0	21	3	14
Estudiantes	6	4	2	0	14	1	14
Tacuary	6	2	0	4	8	21	6
Oriente Petrolero	6	0	0	6	2	20	0

Group D

Jun 27 – Sao Paulo
Sao Paulo (Bra) 2 (Juan 72, Wellington Rato 90+3)
Tigre (Arg) 0

Jun 27 – Ibague
Tolima (Col) 3 (Guzman 5, Bone 27, Herazo 43)
Academia Puerto Cabello (Ven) 1 (Figueroa 45+1)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sao Paulo	6	5	1	0	13	0	16
Tigre	6	3	1	2	7	6	10
Tolima	6	2	2	2	6	8	8
Academia PC	6	0	0	6	2	14	0

Group E

Jun 29 – Santos
Santos (Bra) 0
Blooming (Bol) 0

Jun 29 – Rosario
Newell's Old Boys (Arg) 1 (Mendez 90+7)
Audax Italiano (Chi) 1 (Cereceda 6)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Newell's Old Boys	6	5	1	0	11	4	16
Audax Italiano	6	3	2	1	7	4	11
Santos	6	1	2	3	3	5	5
Blooming	6	0	1	5	3	11	1

Group F

Jun 29 – Montevideo
Penarol (Uru) 1 (S. Rodriguez 28)
America Mineiro (Bra) 2 (Avelar 78, Juninho 88)

Jun 29 – Gobernador Costa
Defensa y Justicia (Arg) 3 (Fernandez 3, 13, 60)
Millonarios (Col) 1 (Catano 18)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Defensa y Justicia	6	5	0	1	15	8	15
America Mineiro	6	3	1	2	12	8	10
Millonarios	6	3	1	2	10	7	10
Penarol	6	0	0	6	4	18	0

Group G

Jun 28 – Bogota
Santa Fe (Col) 1 (Rodallega 72)
Goias (Bra) 2 (Guilherme 24, Matheusinho 90+5)

Jun 28 – Lima
Universitario (Per) 1 (Quispe 40)
Gimnasia y Esgrima (Arg) 0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Goias	6	3	3	0	7	3	12
Universitario	6	3	1	2	6	5	10
Santa Fe	6	2	1	3	5	6	7
Gimnasia y Esgrima	6	1	1	4	2	6	4

Group H

Jun 27 – Buenos Aires
San Lorenzo (Arg) 4 (Bareiro 45+4 pen, 55, Braida 70, Barrios 71)
Estudiantes de Merida (Ven) 1 (Arenas 3)

Jun 27 – Rancagua
Palestino (Chi) 1 (Farias 76)
Fortaleza (Bra) 2 (Lucas Crispim 20, Lucero 74)

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fortaleza	6	5	0	1	17	5	15
San Lorenzo	6	2	2	2	7	6	8
Palestino	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Estudiantes de Merida	6	1	0	5	4	17	3

● *All final standings. Group winners progress to the last 16, with the runners-up entering the play-offs*

Knockout Round Play-Offs – 1st Leg

Jul 11 – Guayaquil
Barcelona (Ecu) 2 (Martinez 29, Corozo 78)
Estudiantes (Arg) 1 (Godoy 45)

Jul 11 – Santiago
Colo-Colo (Chi) 2 (Gil 46, 63)
America Mineiro (Bra) 1 (Ale 90+3)

Jul 11 – Sao Paulo
Corinthians (Bra) 1 (Felipe Augusto 79)
Universitario (Per) 0

Jul 12 – Parana
Patronato (Arg) 0
Botafogo (Bra) 2 (Carlos Alberto 52, Janderson 65)

Jul 12 – Lima
Sporting Cristal (Per) 0
Emelec (Ecu) 1 (Cevallos 52)

Jul 12 – Medellin
Independiente Medellin (Col) 0
San Lorenzo (Arg) 1 (Bareiro 67)

Jul 13 – Concepcion
Nublense (Chi) 0
Audax Italiano (Chi) 0

Jul 13 – Asuncion
Libertad (Par) 2 (Melgarejo 51, Cardozo 88)
Tigre (Arg) 1 (Armoa 35)

Play-Offs – 2nd Leg

Jul 18 – La Plata
Estudiantes (Arg) 4 (Mendez 6, 19, Rollheiser 38, Carrillo 48)
Barcelona (Ecu) 0
Estudiantes win 5-2 on aggregate

Jul 18 – Belo Horizonte
America Mineiro (Bra) 5 (Matheusinho 6, 25, Mastriani 21, 85, Saldivia 90+4 og)
Colo-Colo (Chi) 1 (Thompson 62)
America Mineiro win 6-3 on aggregate

Jul 18 – Lima
Universitario (Per) 1 (Flores 77 pen)
Corinthians (Bra) 2 (Maycon 70, Ryan 90+2)
Corinthians win 3-1 on aggregate

Jul 19 – Rio deJaneiro
Botafogo (Bra) 1 (Luis Henrique 3)
Patronato (Arg) 1 (Arce 67)
Botafogo win 3-1 on aggregate

Jul 19 – Guayaquil
Emelec (Ecu) 0
Sporting Cristal (Per) 0
Emelec win 1-0 on aggregate

Jul 19 – Buenos Aires
San Lorenzo (Arg) 2 (Bareiro 25 pen, 80 pen)
Independiente Medellin (Col) 0
San Lorenzo win 3-0 on aggregate

Jul 20 – Victoria
Tigre (Arg) 0
Libertad (Par) 1 (Barboza 24)
Libertad win 3-1 on aggregate

Jul 20 – Concepcion
Audax Italiano (Chi) -
Nublense (Chi) -
Suspended and rescheduled due to heavy rainfall

Last 16 Draw

Emelec v Defensa y Justicia; Estudiantes v Goias; America Mineiro v Red Bull Bragantino; San Lorenzo v Sao Paulo; Audax Italiano/Nublense v LDU; Libertad v Fortaleza; Corinthians v Newell's Old Boys; Botafogo v Guarani

COLOMBIA

Apertura First Stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Aguilas Doradas	20	11	6	3	32	21	39
Millonarios	20	10	8	2	30	18	38
Atletico Nacional	20	9	8	3	26	14	35
America de Cali	20	9	5	6	32	23	32
Boyaca Chico	20	7	9	4	24	18	30
Alianza Petrolera	20	9	3	8	27	22	30
Independiente Medellin	20	8	5	7	29	24	29
Deportivo Pasto	20	8	5	7	22	21	29
Junior	20	7	7	6	17	17	28
Santa Fe	20	7	5	8	29	25	26
La Equidad	20	5	11	4	20	17	26
Deportivo Pereira	20	6	7	7	24	25	25
Tolima	20	5	9	6	23	26	24
Deportivo Cali	20	5	8	7	20	26	23
Atletico Bucaramanga	20	4	8	8	15	21	20
Envigado	20	4	8	8	14	20	20
Once Caldas	20	4	8	8	17	24	20
Jaguares	20	4	7	9	16	26	19
Union Magdalena	20	3	10	7	16	30	19
Atletico Huila	20	5	3	12	20	35	18

● *The top eight teams progress to the semi-finals*

Apertura Semi-Finals Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Atletico Nacional*	6	3	3	0	7	4	12
Alianza Petrolera	6	2	4	0	8	5	10
Deportivo Pasto	6	1	3	2	6	5	6
Aguilas Doradas	6	0	2	4	4	11	2

**Qualify for the Apertura final*

Apertura Semi-Finals Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Millonarios* (C)	6	4	1	1	9	6	13
America de Cali	6	3	1	2	8	6	10
Boyaca Chico	6	2	2	2	6	6	8
Independiente Medellin	6	0	2	4	3	8	2

**Qualify for the Apertura final*

Apertura Final

Jun 21: Atletico Nacional 0-0 Millonarios
Jun 24: Millonarios 1-1 Atletico Nacional
(agg 1-1, *Millonarios win 3-2 on penalties*)

ECUADOR

First Stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Independiente del Valle*	15	11	1	3	31	15	34
El Nacional	15	10	0	5	32	25	30
LDU	15	7	5	3	29	17	26
Barcelona	15	8	2	5	30	20	26
Aucas	15	7	3	5	17	19	24
Universidad Catolica	15	7	3	5	22	25	24
Delfin	15	7	3	5	18	23	24
Deportivo Cuenca	15	7	0	8	24	21	21
Orense	15	6	3	6	17	21	21
Tecnico Universitario	15	5	3	7	21	15	18
Gualaceo	15	5	3	7	17	23	18
Cumbaya	15	4	5	6	10	13	17
Emelec	15	3	5	7	18	20	14
Libertad	15	2	7	6	20	26	13
Mushuc Runa	15	3	4	8	14	25	13
Guayaquil City	15	3	3	9	17	29	12

**Qualify for the finals*

CONCACAF

2023 CARIBBEAN CLUB SHIELD

Group A
St. Paul's United (Skn), Junior Stars (Smn), Jong Holland (Cuw), Metropolitan (Pur)

Group B
Waterhouse (Jam), South East (Dma), Scholars International (Cay), Golden Lion (Mtq)

Group C
O&M (Dom), B1 (Lca), Etoile Matoury (Guf), Robinhood (Sur)

Group D
Club Sando (Tri), Dakota (Aru), Solidarite-Scolaire (Glp), SWA Sharks (Tca)

2023 CARIBBEAN CUP

Group A
Defence Force (Tri), Cavalier (Jam), Moca (Dom), Athletic Club Port of Spain (Tri), Caribbean Shield Runners-Up

Group B
Cibao (Dom), Atletico Pantoja (Dom), Harbour View (Jam), Dunbeholden (Jam), Caribbean Shield Winners

2023 CENTRAL AMERICAN CUP

Group A
Deportivo Saprissa (Crc), Coban Imperial (Gua), Cartagines (Crc), Universitario (Pan), Jocoro (Slv)

Group B
Olimpia (Hon), Xelaju (Gua), Independiente (Pan), FAS (Slv), Real Esteli (Nca)

Group C
Comunicaciones (Gua), Herediano (Crc), Real Espana (Hon), Aguila (Slv), Diriangen (Nca)

Group D
Alajuelense (Crc), Motagua (Hon), Olancho (Hon), Sporting San Miguelito (Pan), Verdes (Blz)

ARUBA

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RCA	9	6	2	1	30	10	20
Nacional	9	6	0	3	21	15	18
Dakota	9	5	1	3	35	15	16
Estrella	9	4	3	2	16	15	15
Britannia	9	4	2	3	22	13	14
River Plate	9	4	2	3	13	15	14
La Fama	9	3	2	4	6	16	11
Santa Fe*	9	2	1	6	15	20	7
United*	9	2	1	6	14	31	7
Caravel (R)	9	2	0	7	9	31	6

**Enter the relegation play-offs*
● *The top six teams progress to the next stage*

Caya 6 Stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Britannia	10	8	0	2	19	10	24
RCA	10	6	2	2	25	11	20
Dakota	10	5	1	4	21	18	16
Nacional	10	4	2	4	19	21	14
Estrella	10	2	2	6	19	25	8
River Plate	10	1	1	8	18	36	4

● *The top four teams progress to the next stage*

Caya 4 Stage

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
RCA* (C)	3	1	1	1	4	2	4
Dakota*	3	1	1	1	5	6	4
Britannia	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Nacional	3	0	3	0	4	4	3

**Qualify for the championship final*

Championship Final

Jul 9: RCA 2-1 Dakota

CUBA

Clausura

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holguin*	10	6	1	3	18	14	19
Cienfuegos* (C)	10	6	0	4	13	11	18
La Habana	10	5	2	3	14	9	17
Guantanamo	10	4	2	4	16	7	14
Santiago de Cuba	10	2	4	4	11	15	10
Matanzas	10	1	3	6	7	23	6

**Qualify for the Clausura final*

Clausura Final

Jun 17: Cienfuegos 3-2 Holguin
Jun 23: Holguin 1-0 Cienfuegos
(agg 3-3, *Cienfuegos win 5-3 on penalties*)

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Regular Season

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cibao*	16	11	3	2	27	7	36
Atlantico*	16	8	4	4	23	13	28
Moca*	16	9	1	6	25	11	28
Universidad O&M*	16	6	6	4	15	12	24
Vega Real*	16	7	3	6	17	17	24
Atletico Pantoja*	16	6	5	5	19	15	23
Delfines Del Este	16	3	7	6	9	15	16
Jarabacoa	16	4	2	10	17	33	14
San Cristobal	16	1	3	12	7	36	6

**Advance to the championship round*

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Defence Force (C)	22	18	2	2	53	16	56
AC Port of Spain	22	18	1	3	63	18	55
Club Sando	22	15	3	4	43	22	48
La Horquetta Rangers	22	14	1	7	62	31	43
Police	22	12	3	7	43	32	39
Central	22	11	1	10	38	41	34
Point Fortin Civic	22	7	4	11	21	27	25
San Juan Jabloteh	22	6	4	12	35	46	22
W Connection	22	6	4	12	19	36	22
Morvant Caledonia Utd	22	5	2	15	24	50	17
Prison Service	22	3	3	16	16	61	12
Cunupia	22	2	2	18	13	50	8

AFRICA

ALGERIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CR Belouizdad (C)	30	18	10	2	44	21	64
CS Constantine	30	14	8	8	39	26	50
MC Alger	30	12	11	7	21	20	47
El Bayadh	30	13	7	10	34	25	46
ASO Chlef	30	11	9	10	36	31	42
Khenchela	30	12	6	12	29	29	42
Saoura	30	11	9	10	32	25	42
ES Setif	30	11	9	10	38	32	42
Paradou AC	30	11	8	11	35	33	41
MC Oran	30	11	8	11	27	34	41
NC Magra	30	11	7	12	35	36	40
USM Alger	30	11	7	12	31	30	40
US Biskra	30	10	10	10	30	29	40
JS Kabylie	30	10	9	11	35	26	39
RC Arbaa (R)	30	10	6	14	39	43	36
HB Chelghoum Laid (R)	30	0	4	26	11	76	4

BENIN

Regular Season Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Buffles	16	9	5	2	24	12	32
Damissa	16	9	4	3	13	6	31
Cavaliers	16	6	8	2	18	11	26
Takunnin	16	7	4	5	20	9	25
Pantheres	16	5	6	5	12	9	21
Dynamo Parakou	16	5	6	5	9	15	21
Beke Bembereke*	16	3	8	5	12	13	13
Real Sport	16	1	9	6	3	11	12
Dynamique Djougou	16	1	2	13	6	31	5

**Deducted 4 points*

Regular Season Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Loto Popo	16	11	2	3	23	7	35
Dadje	16	9	4	3	19	12	31
Dynamo Abomey	16	9	3	4	28	15	30
Bani Ganse	16	8	4	4	21	20	28
Hodio	16	7	5	4	22	9	26
Tonnerre	16	6	3	7	15	19	21
Espoir Savalou	16	5	3	8	18	24	18
Energie	16	3	2	11	10	25	11
Soleil	16	0	2	14	14	39	2

Regular Season Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Coton Sport Ouidah	16	10	6	0	28	5	36
Requins	16	9	5	2	25	10	32
ASPAC	16	7	7	2	20	12	28
AS Cotonou	16	6	6	4	17	10	24
OFMAS-SAD	16	6	4	6	17	15	22
Aziza	16	5	1	10	12	28	16
Adjidja	16	3	5	8	10	20	14
Police	16	3	3	10	12	29	12
Sitatunga	16	2	5	9	8	20	11

Regular Season Group D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ayema	16	7	7	2	20	10	28
ASVO	16	7	6	3	23	13	27
JAK	16	6	8	2	15	12	26
Dragons	16	6	7	3	10	9	25
JSP	16	6	3	7	16	15	21
Sobemap*	16	7	5	4	16	14	20
Djeffa	16	5	5	6	13	15	20
Avrankou Omnisport	16	2	4	10	10	22	10
JSO	16	3	1	12	12	25	10

**Deducted 6 points*

● *The top four teams in each group advance to championship round, with the bottom five teams entering the relegation rounds*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Coton Sport Ouidah (C)	24	16	5	3	29	13	53
Loto Popo	24	15	6	3	32	13	51
Ayema	24	12	3	9	28	23	39
Dadje	24	11	4	9	24	21	37
Dynamo Abomey	24	8	10	6	27	23	34
Cavaliers	24	7	11	6	20	16	32
ASVO	24	6	13	5	17	13	31
Damissa	24	8	7	9	21	20	31
JAK	24	8	7	9	23	25	31
ASPAC	24	7	9	8	18	20	30
AS Cotonou	24	6	11	7	15	16	29
Takunnin	24	7	8	9	22	26	29
Bani Ganse	24	7	7	10	16	23	28
Requins	24	4	9	11	19	29	21
Buffles	24	5	6	13	18	34	21
Dragons	24	2	10	12	14	28	16

Relegation Round North

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tonnerre	10	6	3	1	13	4	21
Soleil	10	5	3	2	19	12	18
Dynamo Parakou	10	4	3	3	14	10	15
Hodio	10	4	3	3	10	9	15
Real Sport	10	3	4	3	8	6	13
Espoir Savalou	10	3	3	4	5	6	12
Dynamique Djougou	10	2	5	3	9	13	11
Beke Bembereke	10	3	2	5	6	11	11
Pantheres	10	2	4	4	9	14	10
Energie (R)	10	0	6	4	7	15	6

Relegation Round South

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Djeffa	10	5	2	3	15	9	17
Sobemap	10	5	2	3	11	7	17
JSP	10	5	2	3	13	10	17
Adjidja	10	5	1	4	15	8	16
JSO	10	4	3	3	9	9	15
Aziza	10	4	2	4	12	12	14
Avrankou Omnisport	10	3	3	4	13	17	12
Police	10	3	2	5	6	17	11
OFMAS-SAD	10	2	4	4	7	11	10
Sitatunga (R)	10	2	3	5	12	13	9

CAPE VERDE

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mindelense	6	4	2	0	6	0	14
Travadores	6	3	0	3	10	6	9
Santo Crucifixo	6	2	1	3	4	6	7
Juventude do Norte	6	1	1	4	4	12	4

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palmeira (C)	6	4	0	2	10	6	12
Vulcanico	6	3	2	1	8	5	11
Belo Horizonte	6	1	2	3	5	10	5
Os Sanjoanenses	6	1	2	3	7	9	5

Group C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Academica do Mindelo	6	4	1	1	13	7	13
Morabeza	6	2	4	0	6	4	10
Figueirense	6	1	2	3	8	11	5
Varandinha	6	0	3	3	6	11	3

● *Group winners and best runner-up advance*

Semi-Finals

Jun 23: Academica do Mindelo 2-2 Vulcanico; Palmeira 2-2 Mindelense
Jun 30: Vulcanico 3-6 Academica do Mindelo (agg 5-8); Mindelense 1-2 Palmeira (agg 3-4)

Final

Jul 7: Academica do Mindelo 1-1 Palmeira (*AET, Palmiera win 7-6 on penalties*)

ETHIOPIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kedus Giorgis (C)	30	18	10	2	54	21	64
Bahardar	30	17	9	4	51	30	60
Ethiopian Medhin	30	14	7	9	50	42	49
Ethiopia Bunna	30	10	13	7	38	32	43
Fasil Kenema	30	11	10	9	29	24	43
Hadiya Hosaena	30	11	10	9	29	24	43
Awassa Kenema	30	10	12	8	34	32	42
Adama Kenema	30	11	8	11	41	36	41
Mekelakeya	30	11	7	12	39	36	40
Dire Dawa Kenema	30	11	7	12	42	47	40
Sidama Bunna	30	10	8	12	34	42	38
Dicha SC	30	8	13	9	25	27	37
Wolkite Ketema	30	8	11	11	34	39	35
Arba Minch Kenema (R)	30	6	16	8	35	36	34
Legetafo Legedadi (R)	30	4	6	20	24	67	18
Mebrat Hayl (R)	30	2	9	19	27	51	15

GAMBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real de Banjul (C)	30	14	10	6	38	21	52
Falcons	30	14	10	6	33	21	52
Fortune	30	13	9	8	30	23	48
Brikama United	30	12	10	8	40	31	46
Samger	30	12	8	10	30	30	44
Marimoo	30	11	11	8	24	24	44
Wallidan	30	11	10	9	26	23	43
Team Rhino	30	10	10	10	34	29	40
Armed Forces	30	10	9	11	23	26	39
Banjul	30	9	11	10	25	30	38
Steve Biko	30	8	13	9	28	29	37
Waa Banjul Football	30	7	14	9	17	22	35
Greater Tomorrow	30	9	8	13	34	40	35
GAMTEL*	30	8	10	12	23	29	34
Hawks (R)	30	7	10	13	30	38	31
PSV Wellingara (R)	30	4	9	17	25	44	21

Enter the relegation play-off

KENYA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gor Mahia (C)	34	20	10	4	53	22	70
Tusker	34	20	9	5	45	23	69
Police	34	18	10	6	57	22	64
Nzoia Sugar	34	18	10	6	43	23	64
KCB	34	18	10	6	37	19	64
Bandari	34	18	6	10	44	27	60
Leopards	34	14	9	11	32	25	51
Homeboyz	34	13	10	11	35	27	49
Ulinzi Stars	34	12	13	9	35	34	49
Sofapaka	34	10	12	12	32	37	42
Kariobangi Sharks	34	10	11	13	46	46	41
Posta Rangers	34	10	10	14	33	41	40
Bidco United	34	9	9	16	37	36	36
Talanta	34	8	12	14	35	50	36
Nairobi City Stars	34	8	10	16	37	49	34
Wazito*	34	7	8	19	22	50	29
Mathare United (R)	34	8	2	24	26	62	26
Vihiga Bullets (R)	34	3	3	28	28	84	12

Enter the relegation play-off

LIBYA

Regular Season Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ahli Benghazi	18	8	9	1	26	16	33
Al Nasr	18	7	9	2	20	15	30
Al Hilal	18	8	5	5	23	16	29
Al Akhdar	18	7	5	6	23	19	26
Darnes*	18	7	6	5	20	17	24
Al Ta'awon	18	5	9	4	21	21	24
Al Sadaqa	18	4	11	3	16	18	23
Al Suqoor	18	4	8	6	17	22	20
Al Tahaddi**	18	2	8	8	12	20	14
Shabaab Al Jabal* (R)	18	1	4	13	10	24	4

Deducted 3 points
***Enter relegation play-off*

Regular Season Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Ittihad*	18	11	5	2	18	6	35
Al Ahli Tripoli	18	8	8	2	24	11	32
Abu Salim	18	8	8	2	16	8	32
Olympic Azzaweya	18	6	7	5	24	17	25
Asswehly	18	6	6	6	19	20	24
Asaria	18	2	10	6	16	27	16
Al Khmes*	18	4	6	8	11	18	15
Al Madina*	17	2	10	5	13	19	13
Al Ittihad Misurata**	18	2	9	7	12	16	12
Almahalla* (R)	17	1	9	7	11	22	9

Deducted 3 points
***Deducted 3 points and enter relegation play-off*
● *The top three teams in each group qualify for the championship round*

MADAGASCAR

Regular Season North

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fosa Juniors (C)	14	11	1	2	24	7	34
COSFA	14	6	7	1	19	11	25
Ajesaia	14	6	4	4	18	13	22
Fanalamanga	14	6	3	5	16	12	21
ASA Diana	14	6	3	5	28	23	21
USCA Foot	14	5	1	8	14	16	16
Tsaramandroso	14	2	3	9	10	27	9
Tia Kitra (R)	14	1	4	9	10	30	7

Regular Season South

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Elgeco Plus	14	8	5	1	18	9	29
CFFA	14	8	4	2	19	10	28
Mama FCA	14	5	6	3	18	15	21
CS-Disciples	14	5	3	6	24	17	18
Zanak'Ala	14	4	5	5	20	22	17
3FB Toliara	14	5	2	7	16	24	17
Dato FC	14	3	3	8	15	21	12
Jet Kintana (R)	14	3	2	9	11	23	11

● *The top four teams in each group advance*

Quarter-Finals

May 12-14: Ajesaia 2-2 CFFA; Fanalamanga 1-0 Elgeco Plus; CS-Disciples 1-3 Fosa Juniors; Mama FCA 0-1 COSFA
May 26-27: CFFA 1-3 Ajesaia (agg 3-5); COSFA 0-0 Mama FCA (agg 1-0); Elgeco Plus 1-1 Fanalamanga (agg 1-2); Fosa Juniors 3-2 CS-Disciples (agg 6-3)

Semi-Finals

Jun 9-10: Fanalamanga 0-0 COSFA; Ajesaia 1-3 Fosa Juniors
Jun 23-24: COSFA 0-0 Fanalamanga (agg 0-0); Fosa Juniors 3-1 Ajesaia (agg 6-2)

Semi-Final Tiebreaker

Jun 27: COSFA 0-1 Fanalamanga

Final

Jul 8: Fosa Juniors 1-0 Fanalamanga

MALI

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Bamako (C)	30	18	8	4	45	17	62
Djoliba	30	16	11	3	39	12	59
USFAS Bamako	30	12	13	5	32	22	49
Bakaridjan	30	13	8	9	29	23	47
Onze Createurs	30	12	9	9	34	28	45
Afrique Football Elite	30	12	8	10	30	21	44
Bougouni	30	11	10	9	39	35	43
Binga	30	10	13	7	24	19	43
Stade Malien Bamako	30	9	14	7	21	16	41
ASKO	30	8	14	8	25	26	38
Police	30	9	10	11	23	29	37
USC Kita	30	7	12	11	23	28	33
Black Stars	30	6	13	11	30	38	31
COB	30	7	9	14	22	43	30
LC Ba (R)	30	3	13	14	17	36	22
Yeelen Olympique (R)	30	3	3	24	21	61	12

MOROCCO

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FAR Rabat (C)	30	20	7	3	50	19	67
Wydad Casablanca	30	19	9	2	47	21	66
FUS Rabat	30	15	10	5	36	16	55
Olympic Safi	30	12	11	7	34	28	47
Raja Casablanca	30	11	11	8	31	26	44
RSB Berkane	30	11	11	8	31	29	44
Hassania Agadir	30	10	9	11	30	29	39
UTS Rabat	30	9	9	12	34	40	36
JS Soualem	30	9	9	12	31	40	36
Maghreb Fes	30	7	13	10	27	33	34
Mouloudia Oujda	30	8	8	14	30	35	32
Chabab Mohammedia	30	8	7	15	27	36	31
Moghreb Tetouan	30	6	12	12	28	41	30
Ittihad Tanger	30	8	5	17	23	39	29
Khouribga (R)	30	5	13	12	29	36	28
Difaa El Jadida (R)	30	5	10	15	24	44	25

TUNISIA

Regular Season Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Esperance	14	9	4	1	25	8	31
Etoile du Sahel	14	9	2	3	23	11	29
Tataouine	14	4	6	4	13	15	18
CS Sfaxien	14	3	7	4	9	10	16
Stade Tunisien	14	4	4	6	14	17	16
Bizertin	14	4	4	6	12	17	16
Hammam-Sousse	14	3	5	6	9	18	14
Chebba (R)	14	3	2	9	8	17	11

Regular Season Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
US Monastir	14	9	2	3	17	5	29
Ben Guerdane	14	8	3	3	14	8	27
Olympique Beja	14	7	3	4	21	14	24
Club Africain	14	7	3	4	16	13	24
Metlaoui	14	5	4	5	14	17	19
Soliman	14	4	5	5	11	14	17
EO Sidi Bouzid	14	2	3	9	9	19	9
Rejiche (R)	14	1	3	10	5	17	6

● *The top four teams in each group advance to championship round, with the teams finishing fifth to seventh entering the relegation round*

Championship Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Etoile du Sahel (C)	14	9	4	1	19	3	34
Esperance	14	7	3	4	20	10	28
Club Africain	14	7	5	2	17	9	27
US Monastir	14	6	4	4	23	14	26
Ben Guerdane	14	5	3	6	18	16	21
CS Sfaxien	14	4	5	5	12	10	18
Olympique Beja	14	4	2	8	9	20	16
Tataouine	14	0	2	12	6	42	4

Relegation Round

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Stade Tunisien	10	5	3	2	13	7	22
Bizertin	10	5	2	3	12	5	19
Soliman	10	4	2	4	8	12	16
Metlaoui	10	2	4	4	7	13	14
EO Sidi Bouzid (R)	10	3	3	4	12	12	12
Hammam-Sousse (R)	10	3	2	5	12	15	11

ASIA

LAOS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Young Elephants (C)	14	12	2	0	39	5	38
Master 7	14	9	1	4	42	15	28
Ezra	14	7	4	3	39	12	25
Lao Army	14	6	5	3	20	14	23
Luangprabang FC	14	3	5	6	33	17	14
Champasak FC	14	3	2	9	13	42	11
Namtha United	14	1	5	8	10	24	8
Viengchanh	14	2	2	10	11	78	8

MONGOLIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ulaanbaatar* (C)	24	21	2	1	108	15	62
Deren	24	15	3	6	76	29	48
Falcons	24	14	4	6	68	29	46
Khovd**	24	15	3	6	86	37	42
Tuv Buganuud**	24	12	0	12	73	66	30
Khangarid	24	7	2	15	43	96	23
Khaan Khuns/Erchim*	24	8	1	15	55	61	22
Khoromkhon	24	5	2	17	33	84	17
Lions***	24	2	1	21	31	156	7
Ulaanbaatar City** (R)	0	0	0	0	0	0	-6

Deducted 3 points
***Deducted 6 points*
****Enter the relegation play-offs*

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GROUP EDITOR
Stephen Fishlock

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Jamie Evans & Jared Tinslay

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Kelsey Media, The Granary, Downs Court, Yalding Hill, Yalding, Maidstone, Kent, ME18 6AL

ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP
Talk Media Ltd: Russell Bedford
Tel. 01732 445328
Email: russell@talk-media.uk

AD PRODUCTION MANAGER
Talk Media Ltd: Nick Bond
Tel. 01732 445325
Email: nick@talk-media.uk

PUBLISHER Steve Brown
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Phil Weeden
MANAGING DIRECTOR Kevin McCormick
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF CONSUMER ADVERTISING Oswin Grady
OPERATIONS DIRECTOR Gill Lambert
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Luka Modric

Real Madrid 4 Atletico Madrid 1

2014 Champions League final, Lisbon

The legendary Real Madrid and Croatia midfielder reflects on his two biggest matches for both club and country

"In my career, I have been lucky enough to play in many games I consider special. The first one is winning the Champions League title with Real in 2014, the legendary *La Decima*. It was Real's first title in the Champions League after waiting for 12 years. For me it was special, both because it was my first Champions League final and because in my second season at the club I had gained the status of a starter, a leader. I was very excited, but without any fear. I couldn't wait for the game to start.

The magical moment was a corner-kick in stoppage time, which I took, when everyone thought that everything was lost. Although time was running out, I walked calmly towards the corner as my instinct told me that we would score. Carvajal came to me and wanted us to play a short corner, but I decided to take a cross, as we rehearsed it in training, to send the ball to the area where Sergio Ramos could go for it with a high header.

After he scored, I had the feeling that I was floating in ecstasy. What a fantastic moment, an incredible feeling of happiness and a strong rise of self-confidence and power. I was sure, just like my team-mates, that we would break Atletico in extra-time.

Exactly like that, it happened. On that unforgettable night, I realised the DNA of Real and I learned to never give up until the final whistle – things can always change in a second. That knowledge became a big ally for our self-confidence in the subsequent eight years when we won many trophies, including another four Champions League titles, three in successive seasons.

I played several Champions League finals, and each of them was special, but we all know the meaning of a World Cup final. It's the game of all games for the whole world. In the build-up to that game and on match day, everything was like a fairy tale atmosphere. The whole world waits for that game, everyone is watching, and we were part of it.

As kids we all dream about it, but when it happens to you it's an indescribable experience. Unfortunately for Croatia, that final in 2018 didn't end as we wished but, for our country and for all of us who participated at that World Cup, being part of the final against such a big and mighty opponent like France was phenomenal.

I always get goose bumps when I remember the feeling of pride while listening to the anthem, and the knowledge that a fantastic game is just about to kick off, with an historical opportunity. Sadly, although in that game we came from behind, in the end France were more successful. After some hard moments following the final whistle, we quickly managed to get into a happy mood as we took the second place in the world. The welcome in Croatia was as if we were world champions."

Interview by Vladimir Novak (with special thanks to Robert Matteoni, co-author of Modric's autobiography Luka Modric: My Game)

Campeones **...Modric lifts the Champions League trophy**

Dejected...Modric reacts after the 2018 World Cup final defeat

> "I had the feeling that I was floating in ecstasy. What a fantastic moment, an incredible feeling"

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NEXT MONTH

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2023 Women's World Cup

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